

A COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF BRITISH AND
AMERICAN STRATEGY IN THE SOUTHERN
CAMPAIGN OF 1780-1781

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by

JOEL ANTHONY WOODWARD, MAJ, USA
B.A., Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, 1987
M.A., University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, 1999

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
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Approved by:

_____, Thesis Committee Chair
LTC Edward L. Bowie, M.A.

_____, Member
LTC Christopher Paul McPadden, M.A.

_____, Member
LTC Versalle F. Washington, Ph.D.

Accepted this 31st day of May 2002 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Philip J. Brookes, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

A COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN STRATEGY IN THE SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN OF 1780-1781, by Major Joel A. Woodward, 102 pages.

This thesis is an analysis and evaluation of the British and American campaign strategies in the Southern Campaign of the War for American Independence. After over four and one-half years of inconclusive fighting in America, the British government developed a plan to restore Royal control of the American South where large numbers of Loyalist Americans were expected to rally in support of the Crown. Control of the southern provinces would allow the British army to isolate the North where the rebellion was strongest. In May 1780, the American army of the South surrendered to a British army at Charlestowne, South Carolina. The Americans raised a new army in the South, but it too was decisively defeated at Camden, South Carolina, in August 1780. American prospects in the Southern Department appeared bleak until the arrival of Nathanael Greene in December 1780. Despite a scarcity of resources, Greene rebuilt the American southern army and fought an inspired campaign of compound warfare to counter the expanding British control of the Carolinas. Lord Cornwallis led the British army on a protracted pursuit of Greene's forces across North Carolina following the American victory at Cowpens in January 1781. The British army, operating well beyond its supply lines, was exhausted by the pursuit of Greene. Despite winning a narrow tactical victory at Guilford Courthouse in March of 1781, the British force was rendered operationally ineffective. Cornwallis withdrew to Virginia where he would ultimately be trapped at Yorktown.

This thesis demonstrates the application of operational design using the British and American strategies in the Southern Campaign as a historical case study. The methodology for this study is based on the linkages between ends, ways, and means through the elements of operational design. Nathanael Greene ultimately succeeded because he implemented a strategy that was designed to match his means to his ends.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

By 1780, the War for American Independence had continued for over four and a half inconclusive years. With almost nothing to show for the heavy cost in blood and treasure, war-weary Americans were wavering in their commitment to the cause of Independence. The American economy was shattered and foreign credit had dried up.¹ The war was also growing unpopular in Great Britain. France's entry into the war and the accumulating expenses of the trans-Atlantic conflict created a political crisis in Britain. Opposition to Lord North's administration spread within Parliament. The increasingly desperate circumstances prompted the British to refocus their efforts by opening a new campaign in the American South.²

Many officials within the British government believed that large numbers of Loyalist Americans would rise up in support of the King's army in the Carolinas. With these states returned to Royal control, the British Army would march north, retaking the middle states of Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, ultimately forcing Washington's Army into a decisive battle.³ British leaders expected that success in the South would open the way to ultimate victory in the North. Indeed, the Southern Campaign did shape the conditions for a decisive strategic victory, only not quite in the manner envisioned by the British.

Why did the British lose the Southern Campaign when they appeared to hold most of the advantages at the outset? Even if the Loyalists in the South did not comprise a majority of the populace, they certainly existed in sufficient numbers to pose a significant challenge to Patriot governance of North and South Carolina.⁴ Furthermore,

socioeconomic divisions between lowlanders and backcountry residents undermined Patriot leaders' ability to rally adherents to their cause. Many backcountry settlers regarded the Patriot leadership from Charleston and Wilmington with as much suspicion as they bestowed on the British authorities.⁵

Militarily, the British advantage seemed formidable both quantitatively and qualitatively. The Americans relied on militia and irregular soldiers to fill out their formations. Practically all of the American officers were amateurs as well. In contrast, the British Army that took the field in the South was predominately composed of veterans and professionals. Additionally, organized British forces consistently outnumbered their American counterparts throughout the campaign. In terms of quality and quantities of materiel, the British also held a marked advantage over the Patriots. Naval superiority and the attendant control of the sea lines of communication allowed the British to isolate the South. How the British failed to win this campaign is a question that begs examination. This thesis will analyze and evaluate the British and American campaign strategies in search of the factors that contributed to an unexpected outcome.

Secondary Questions

A number of related questions arise in the examination of this topic. For example, what were the British and American national objectives for the war? How did the terrain, geography, and socioeconomic factors influence the campaign? What were the military, political, economic, and informational objectives for both sides in this campaign? What were the centers of gravity and perceived centers of gravity? How did the belligerents employ available resources? Why did the level of Loyalist support fall so short of British expectations? Were British expectations of Loyalist support based on flawed assumptions

or did they fail to match their ends, ways, and means? How did commanders control and synchronize disparate forces? How did each side address culmination? Under what constraints did the opposing forces operate?

Scope

For the purposes of this thesis, the Southern Campaign is defined as the period beginning with the British invasion of South Carolina in February 1780 and lasting until the Battle of Eutaw Springs in September 1781. By that time, American forces had regained control over almost all of the Carolinas excluding British-held Charlestowne. While related actions occurred in Georgia, Virginia and on the western frontier, these operations were not central to the campaign overall. A focus on operations across the Carolinas is sufficient for demonstrating the propositions of this thesis.

In scope, this paper focuses on strategic and operational planning and concepts of the Southern Campaign in 1780 and 1781. This thesis is not a study of tactics. Tactical level aspects will only be addressed where directly relevant towards illustrating or supporting an operational or strategic level concept. This thesis is written for an audience of both military professionals and academic military historians. As such, the analysis is framed in military terms. The introductory discussion of methodology and definitions at the end of this chapter will clarify the structure and terms employed.

Organization

Following the introduction, the second chapter of this thesis consists of a chronological narrative of the War for Independence and the Southern Campaign. This background chapter establishes the historical context and strategic setting, and provides a

broad overview of the campaign. The third and fourth chapters discuss British and American operational designs respectively. These chapters describe and analyze the linkages and discrepancies between the belligerents' national objectives, their campaign plans, and how they employed their resources. An evaluation of the relative strengths and weaknesses of British and American campaign strategies concludes both the third and fourth chapters. A final chapter summarizes the conclusions of the thesis and discusses the modern relevance of the Southern Campaign.

Significance of the topic

The Southern Campaign is significant for its role in history as well as its modern relevance. In the context of the War for American Independence, this campaign set the stage for the American victory at Yorktown and subsequent independence. For the modern scholar or military professional, the Southern Campaign offers several useful illustrations. With the renewed emphasis on unconventional warfare and other indirect applications of power, the value of popular support cannot be understated. The Southern Campaign offers important lessons on the need to take popular sentiment and support into consideration in campaign planning.

The Southern Campaign provides many useful examples of current doctrinal concepts. Under present doctrine, military operations are categorized as decisive, shaping or sustaining. Decisive operations directly achieve the overall objective. Shaping operations produce favorable conditions for the decisive operation to succeed. Sustaining operations support decisive and shaping operations by generating military capabilities.⁶ At the strategic level, the Southern Campaign constituted a shaping operation for the decisive American operation at Yorktown. The British intended the Southern Campaign

as a shaping operation in support of an eventual decisive operation against George Washington's Continental Army.

Another modern imperative is the commander's intent. A commander translates his vision of how an operation will be conducted into a succinct statement to focus subordinates' efforts on a common purpose and end state.⁷ A well-articulated vision and intent from a higher commander insures unity of effort at every echelon. The senior British leadership and the lower echelon leaders and troops in this campaign lacked a clear and common understanding of their purpose and objectives. This disconnection thwarted British intentions and underscores the importance of a shared focus.

Additionally, the Southern Campaign serves as a good example of the emerging historical model of compound warfare. Compound warfare refers to the use of regular and irregular forces in concert against a stronger opponent.⁸ The British campaign plan envisioned, if it did not achieve, the synchronized use of conventional troops and Loyalist militia to secure the Carolinas. For the Americans, compound warfare was the result of necessity. American commanders had to rely on irregular forces to augment their scarce contingents of regulars. Nathanael Greene ultimately found a way to employ his conventional and unconventional means to achieve his theater objectives.

This study of the Southern Campaign exposes how British and American commanders implicitly utilized the same conceptual approach to campaign strategy as modern leaders use. Strategy is a function of the interplay between ends, ways, and means. "Ends" are the objectives and end states that a strategy is designed to attain. The strategist formulates "ways" to accomplish these objectives by developing an operational concept, or plan, to eliminate or reduce the enemy's sources of strength using the

“means” available.⁹ These terms will be further defined later in this chapter. For the purposes of this thesis, campaign strategy will be further dissected into the elements of operational design.

This thesis especially demonstrates the structure of campaign planning, or operational design, using the Southern Campaign as an illustration. The operational level of warfare represents an intermediate category of operations between the strategic and tactical levels. This level of warfare consists of campaigns and major operations. Operational design is the process that translates the broadest of strategic objectives down to how leaders apply their resources at the lowest echelons.¹⁰ The elements of operational design form the basis for the methodology of this thesis.

Methodology

The methodology for this thesis is based on the operational design model. Put simply, operational design is a modern theory for developing campaign strategies. Operational design provides a continuous link from national-level political objectives to theater-level operations and further to tactical-level decisions.¹¹ The Prussian military thinker Carl von Clausewitz described theory as a guide for analyzing history.¹² Theory focuses the study of history and provides a method for evaluating the application of means. Clausewitz argued that such critical analysis is an essential element of a military education.¹³ In like fashion, this thesis applies present-day theory to the study of the Southern Campaign of 1780-1781. My purpose is not to hold eighteenth century leaders to modern standards. Instead, this thesis is designed to examine the efficacy of the current model of operational art by using the Southern Campaign as a vehicle for exercising the modern process of strategy formulation.

As previously stated, current military theory describes strategy in terms of ends, ways and means. Ends are the goals and objectives for the campaign. The plans and policies initiated to achieve those goals are the ways. The means are the resources used to carry out the plans. An effective campaign strategy incorporates each of these components balanced in relation to the others.¹⁴ The elements of operational design are nested within these three components of strategy.

The theater-level objectives and desired end state represent the ends of a given campaign. These ends are derived from national strategic level objectives. Clausewitz' argument that policy objectives determine war aims provides a theoretical foundation for this relationship.¹⁵ A "desired end state" is simply the conditions envisioned by the commander or strategist that will provide a favorable outcome at the end of the campaign. Defining the end state ties operational strategy to national strategy and focuses campaign planning.¹⁶ Just as modern strategists do, British and American leaders in 1780-1781 sought to achieve a set of conditions favorable to their respective national aims. With the end state in mind, an operational level commander develops theater-level objectives.

The commander determines the operational objectives by first identifying the sources of an enemy's power or "centers of gravity." Clausewitz developed the concept of centers of gravity.¹⁷ His basic definition of centers of gravity is incorporated in current US doctrine. A center of gravity is a characteristic, asset, or capability that provides a force with its ability and will to fight. Commanders use centers of gravity to identify enemy strengths and weaknesses. Operational objectives are designed to neutralize or destroy an enemy's center of gravity.¹⁸ The commander attacks the enemy centers of

gravity by selecting key objectives called “decisive points” that offer a significant military advantage. A physical decisive point may be a piece of terrain, a force or a key system. An event or a moral factor such as will to fight or popular support may constitute an abstract decisive point.¹⁹ Centers of gravity and decisive points form the essential operational objectives for achieving the desired end state.

The operational concept articulates the ways component of campaign strategy. The commander develops the ways of achieving the operational objectives by deciding how to apply the available resources to curtail the enemy’s operational capabilities. The modern idea of campaign planning is centered on the theater concept of operations. The present-day commander uses a concept statement to articulate his vision of how the campaign will proceed and how the available means will be applied to achieve the desired end state. The concept provides focus to subordinate leaders to insure unity of effort and synchronization.²⁰ In short, the concept of operations expresses the “ways” to accomplish the theater objectives using available resources.

The essence of the operational concept is the commander’s vision of the campaign or operation. Eighteenth century military planning did not emphasize the use of a formal process or a concise concept statement. While the explicit enunciation of the operational concept may be a modern standard, military leaders have always formulated an operational concept at least mentally. The thought process behind the general planning steps in use today is not much different from the implicit thought process of an Eighteenth century strategist. This thesis identifies these conceptual plans by examining the correspondence and actions of American and British leaders during the Southern Campaign.

Resources and the application of resources that generate capabilities are the means with which a strategy is executed. Resources include forces, supplies, weapons, and manpower.²¹ Clausewitz argued that troops and arms in and of themselves do not constitute the means. A commander's means consisted of what we call combat power today. Combat power is a synthesis of physical and moral qualities that reside in an army and is translated into its fighting ability.²² Intangible capabilities such as command and control, intelligence, firepower, mobility, or popular support may also constitute operational means. The Southern Campaign was characterized by a lack of resources for both the British and Americans. In such circumstances, the effective use of resources gains heightened importance.

Phasing and synchronization are methods of applying means to achieve maximum effects. Modern commanders arrange operations in phases to husband resources, synchronize efforts, establish prerequisite conditions for subsequent operations, or allow for adjustments as the situation changes.²³ Additionally, commanders synchronize disparate capabilities to achieve overwhelming effects.²⁴ These elements of operational design are also evident in the Southern Campaign of 1780-1781. British leaders planned the campaign in deliberate phases and sought to synchronize regular and militia operations.

Three criteria used to evaluate strategy are feasibility, acceptability, and suitability. Each of these criteria measures one of the components of strategy. To be considered feasible, the strategic concept, operational tasks, and sequence of actions must be possible and practicable given the situation and the resources at hand. Ways must meet a standard of feasibility. Acceptability is a cost-benefit analysis used to appraise the

disposition and application of means. In other words, the potential gain must justify the potential cost or consequences. Finally, the ends must be suitable. Objectives must support the desired end state and the ultimate strategic aims to be considered suitable.²⁵ I will apply these criteria to the British and American operational designs in the Southern Campaign.

The methodology applied in this thesis offers relevant lessons in strategic and operational planning for the contemporary student of warfare. Academic historians might also find this analytical model useful for understanding the outcome of the Southern Campaign. Supporting research is based on an historical analysis of the Southern Campaign in terms of how military planners understand the strategic and operational levels of warfare today. Analysis, conclusions, and supporting evidence are arranged in a narrative format. Historical evidence drawn from a variety of primary and secondary sources demonstrates the objectives, intentions and *de facto* campaign plans of each side. Some points may be repeated in overlapping elements of the operational design. For example, Charlestowne served as both a center of gravity and a decisive point. Such repetition is not redundant as it portrays distinctions in modern theory that did not exist in the minds of eighteenth century commanders.

Definitions

There are many terms used interchangeably throughout the existing literature on the War for American Independence, or as generalities in modern usage, but which require definition here for purposes of clarity and style. Explanations of military terms are useful since meanings evolve as doctrine and theory changes. The following definitions are simply my own interpretations of these terms for drawing distinctions and

identifying useful synonyms throughout this thesis. Another mechanical consideration is the use of contemporary versus modern place names and spellings. I have chosen to use names and spellings as used during the eighteenth century. Therefore, what we know today as Charleston, South Carolina, is referred to as “Charlestowne,” and Charlotte, North Carolina as, “Charlottetowne.”

There were numerous factions involved in the Southern Campaign on both sides of the contest. On the side of the Crown were both British soldiers and American colonists who remained loyal to the King and opposed the rebellion. While the British in America and the loyal American colonists shared political aims, these two groups comprised separate categories. The term “British” in this paper refers only to those people native to Great Britain and serving in some official capacity in the American colonies. This group is primarily composed of the British Army but also includes Royal governors and other administrative officials. “British forces” or “British Army” includes any Germans or Loyalists that functioned as part of those formations. Those American colonists who remained loyal to the Crown (in sympathies if not actions) are referred to in different sources as “Loyalists,” “Royalists,” “Tories,” and “King’s Friends.” In this paper, I will use the term “Loyalists” to broadly describe those colonists who supported Royal authority and opposed the rebellion in any degree.

On the other side of the issue were the American “Patriots.” Here also, the literature provides a variety of terms with different connotations. The British and Loyalists rightly referred to those Americans engaged in resistance to Royal authority as “Rebels.” American sources used the term, “Patriots” to describe that same category. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term “Patriots” because at this late stage of the

war nationalistic sentiment had taken root across American society and independence, not just reform, was the widely accepted political objective. Another term I will employ to describe the Patriots and Patriot forces is “American.” This usage excludes Loyalists even though they were Americans too in that they lived in America also, many for their entire lives. I use this definition as a matter of style to avoid overuse of the word “Patriot.”

Military and paramilitary organizations are another point of potential ambiguity. A number of relevant characteristics are useful in drawing distinctions. For the purposes of this paper, the term “irregulars” will be used to describe those combatant soldiers and units that were not professionally organized, trained or led, did not operate with a set organizational structure or support system, and were raised on an ad hoc basis of indeterminate duration. Irregulars were generally not paid and frequently answered to no higher authority than their chosen leader. “Partisans” is another term for irregular volunteers. “Militia” indicates a semipermanent unit formed for the common defense of a specific state or locality. Militias normally adopted a formal organizational structure, trained in basic tactics, and were usually responsible to the governor of their home state. Finally, “regulars” defines those professional forces with permanent structures, long terms of service, and employed throughout the colonies. On the American side, regulars were also known as “continentals,” therefore I will use the terms interchangeably.

The military terminology employed for this thesis is based on current U.S. doctrine. Although these terms were not used in the same manner during the eighteenth century, military leaders of that time period would certainly have understood the concepts involved. Conceptually, the mental process of developing a campaign strategy has not

changed greatly since the eighteenth century. Today, strategy formulation is more formalized with defined terms identifying each step of the process. The use of modern terms facilitates analysis of the campaign in its component parts.

The terms, “operational design,” and “campaign strategy” are similar, yet distinct. “Campaign strategy” is a slightly broader term that encompasses the concept of “operational design,” but may also extend to the application of nonmilitary instruments of power.²⁶ “Operational design” refers to the deliberate process of applying military resources in the most effective manner to achieve the desired end state.²⁷ The campaign-level military objectives that directly support the national strategic aims are, “operational objectives.” A “center of gravity,” is the basis of an enemy’s strength and capabilities. Centers of gravity are the focus of an operational design.²⁸ The terms “operational level” and “theater level” are interchangeable in this thesis. “Lines communication” is used to describe the physical features that link a military force to its sources of support. This term generally refers to roads or navigable waterways in an eighteenth century context. “Culmination” indicates that a force has exhausted its capacity to continue operating effectively.²⁹ These definitions clarify the meanings of terms that are used with frequency or carry particular salience. Other terms may be defined as they appear in the body of this thesis.

Campaign strategy in the eighteenth century was not the explicit and coherent product of a deliberate planning process as it is today. Frequently strategy existed only at a conceptual level. It would be patently unjust to hold the British and American leaders of the Southern Campaign to current standards of strategic and operational planning. Still, the outlines of the modern framework of strategy formulation are evident in this study of

the campaign of 1780-1781. Clausewitz observed that theory is a tool for examining the relationships between ends and means using historical examples.³⁰ The measure of a strategist's performance is how successfully the means available are used to achieve the ends.³¹ This thesis uses the operational design theory to evaluate the linkage of ends, ways, and means in the Southern Campaign of 1780-1781. British strategy failed because it did not match its ends, ways, and means effectively. Conversely, the Americans ultimately succeeded when Nathanael Greene did apply the means available to attain the desired strategic ends.

¹Maurice Matloff, ed., *American Military History* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office for Center of Military History, 1989), 18-19.

²Paul H. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats: A Study in British Revolutionary Policy* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Virginia, 1964), 79-82.

³John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 197-199.

⁴Smith, 89.

⁵John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 95-99.

⁶US Army, *Field Manual 3-0: Operations* (Washington DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, June 2001), 4-23 - 4-24.

⁷*Ibid.*, 5-14.

⁸Thomas Huber, "Napoleon in Spain and Naples: Fortified Compound Warfare," *The Evolution of Modern Warfare*, US Army Command and General Staff College C600 Term I Syllabus/Book of Readings, ed. Christopher R. Gabel, (Ft. Leavenworth KS: Combat Studies Institute, July 2001), 172.

⁹Arthur F. Lykke Jr. "Defining Military Strategy," *Military Review*, January-February 1997, 183.

¹⁰US Army, *Field Manual 3-0: Operations*, 2-2-2-4.

- ¹¹Ibid., 5-6.
- ¹²Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 141.
- ¹³Ibid., 156-158.
- ¹⁴Lykke, 183-185.
- ¹⁵Clausewitz, 80-81, 606-607.
- ¹⁶Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-0: *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, September 2001), III-2.
- ¹⁷Clausewitz, 595-596.
- ¹⁸Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, III-22; and US Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, 5-7.
- ¹⁹Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-0: Doctrine for Joint Operations*, III-23; US Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, 5-7.
- ²⁰Lamar Tooke, "Formulating a Theater Strategic Concept of Operations," *Military Review*, June 1994, 9-10.
- ²¹Lykke, 185.
- ²²Michael Howard, *Clausewitz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 35-36.
- ²³Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-0: *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, III-18.
- ²⁴Ibid., III-10.
- ²⁵Ted Davis, "Evaluating National Security and National Military Strategy," *Fundamentals of Operational Warfighting*, DJMO Selected Readings Book, vol. I, ed. John N. Cary (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, August 2001), L-1--E-1.
- ²⁶Lykke, 183-184.
- ²⁷US Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, 5-6.
- ²⁸Ibid., 5-7.
- ²⁹Ibid., 5-9--5-10.
- ³⁰Clausewitz, 142.

³¹Howard, 37.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

In 1775, tension between Britain and her North American colonies erupted into armed conflict. Over the previous years a vocal segment of colonial society, calling themselves “Patriots,” fanned the flames of discontent with British rule. Boston, Massachusetts, had become the moral center of the nascent American resistance to Royal authority. To maintain control, the Crown sent British troops to occupy Boston in 1774. The mere presence of these troops had the contrary effect of inflaming Patriot resentment and suspicions. Patriot leaders in Boston rallied local militias and gathered arms in anticipation of an impending fight.¹

On 18 April 1775 the British commander at Boston dispatched a detachment to seize and destroy Patriot arms and munitions stockpiled at nearby Concord. Early the next morning, a company of Patriot militia mustered at Lexington to block the British column. In a brief exchange of gunfire the British swept the militia aside, killing eight Patriots. Word of the episode spread rapidly throughout the area and hordes of indignant and angry Americans converged on the British force at Concord, weapons in hand. The outnumbered British, under fire from every quarter, made a hasty retreat towards Boston. Hundreds of British and Americans were killed or wounded.² The events at Lexington and Concord initiated a war that would reach its conclusion over six years later on other fields far to the south.

Americans were divided in their opinions and loyalties throughout the conflict, but especially so at the outset. Early on, most Americans simply wanted to protect their civil, representative, and commercial rights within the British Empire. The fledgling

Congress, characterized by its lack of consensus as well as its lack of power, was divided between advocates of reconciliation and agitators for independence. In the aftermath of Lexington and Concord however, support for compromise and reconciliation slipped away as heated calls for independence gained traction. Final American overtures for negotiations were dismissed by Parliament who saw a diplomatic resolution tantamount to the cession of sovereignty.³ By July of 1776, after a year of escalating conflict and rhetoric, the aim of sovereignty had gained enough political currency to be formally articulated. The independence movement was no longer the province of a radical fringe of society. Achieving independence became the mainstream American national strategic objective.

Great Britain responded to the American colonists' dissension and ultimate rebellion with military force. Owing to the size of the territory and population, the King's ministers recognized that complete subjugation of the American colonies would be practically impossible.⁴ British ships and soldiers were meant to intimidate the colonists into submission.⁵ Whigs and Tories in Parliament disagreed on the terms of colonial policy, yet there was consensus on the need to suppress the rebellion and retain Royal control over the American colonies. Great Britain had significant economic interests in North America. Any serious interruption of trade might undermine Britain's position relative to France, her great adversary. Equally important was the imperative to assert control over the colonies before the rebellion undermined the authority of Parliament throughout the Empire as well as at home.⁶ Within Parliament, the ruling Tory party felt that the American insurrection had to be met with firm measures to maintain their place in power. Any vacillation or appeasement of the colonists could fracture the Tories

political support and potentially bring down the government.⁷ Great Britain's clear national strategic objective was to retain the American colonies.

The British responded in force to rebellion in the summer of 1776. In June, a British force under Lieutenant General Sir Henry Clinton set out to secure the Carolinas with the intention of isolating New England from the southern colonies and their material support. The Americans put up a stubborn resistance however, and Clinton failed to gain a foothold in the South.⁸ The British focus remained on quelling the rebellion in the northern colonies. Some 26,000 British troops arrived in North America in July to reinforce General William Howe's army. Howe quickly captured New York after defeating General George Washington's young army on Long Island. American morale sunk as Howe's army overcame New York and New Jersey. Congress evacuated Philadelphia and Washington's army seemed to evaporate as dispirited soldiers deserted.⁹ By late 1776, American prospects seemed bleak.

On Christmas day of 1776, General Washington took his ragged army across the Delaware River and launched an attack on an unsuspecting Hessian garrison at Trenton, New Jersey. Washington's successful surprise attack also gave Patriot morale a desperately needed boost.¹⁰ The action at Trenton and the subsequent American victory over a small British force near Princeton bought Washington valuable time to build up his army. Clearly the British and their German mercenaries were not invincible after all. British forces in New Jersey, having received a bloody nose, went on the defensive.¹¹ The last days of 1776 revived American hopes and confidence.

In London, British ministers saw Washington's winter attacks as evidence of American desperation.¹² Lord George Germain, Britain's Secretary of State overseeing

the American Department, instructed his generals to mount a campaign in the North that to split the colony of New York in two along the Hudson River. General John Burgoyne attacked south from Canada down the Hudson valley in June 1777. Howe was to come up from the south and join Burgoyne's force. The campaign failed to achieve its objectives. Burgoyne met with stronger Patriot opposition than anticipated and Howe, mired in Philadelphia, never launched his supporting attack. The following October, the American army won a stunning victory over Burgoyne's forces at Saratoga.¹³

After the victory at Saratoga, France, concluded a treaty of alliance with the United States. The French entry into the conflict fulfilled the British government's worst fears. For the French, this was an opportunity to take advantage of her rival's weakness and help strip the valuable American colonies from the British Empire. To the Americans, the promise of French assistance gave the idea of independence substance.¹⁴ Although the Franco-American alliance was promulgated in February 1778, the French did not take an active role in the conflict until June. The French challenged Britain for mastery of the seas and posed a threat to British colonies in the West Indies.¹⁵

In December 1777, the ill-provisioned Continental Army went into winter quarters at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Washington's troops suffered a lack of almost every bare essential. Clothing, blankets and shoes were all scarce. Soldiers relied on flimsy shelters for protection from the weather. The shortage of food posed the greatest difficulty. General Washington appointed Nathanael Greene as quartermaster general to remedy the supply problems that plagued the American army. Greene's tireless efforts improved conditions. Nonetheless, the army was declining rapidly from illness, poor nutrition and desertions. In February 1778, Washington commissioned Frederick von

Steuben, a former German officer, as inspector general. Von Steuben spent the balance of the winter drilling the Continental soldiers in European style tactics.¹⁶ The efforts of Nathanael Greene and Frederick von Steuben were invaluable to Washington's army. By spring, the Continental Army was trained and supported better than ever before.

Sir Henry Clinton assumed the role of British Commander-in-Chief in America when General Howe resigned in the wake of Saratoga.¹⁷ The French threat to British possessions in the West Indies caused the British to move some forces from North America to the Caribbean. With fewer troops, Clinton had to prioritize his requirements.¹⁸ In June of 1778, Clinton abandoned Philadelphia and began moving his army overland to New York. General Washington realized that the British Army was vulnerable during this extended movement and moved to attack Clinton on the march. A British force under Lieutenant General Charles the Earl of Cornwallis guarded the rear of the British column. General Cornwallis turned and rebuffed the American attack at Monmouth Courthouse, New Jersey. Washington in turn checked Cornwallis' counterattack.¹⁹ This was to be the final encounter between the two main armies in the north. Decisive victory eluded both sides. With the war at an impasse, the best either army could strive for was to avoid losing. The conflict became a war of attrition and a contest of will.²⁰ For more than a year following Monmouth Courthouse, the campaign in the North ground to a standoff.

With the lack of progress in the North and the added threat of French involvement, the British Government began to consider redirecting their efforts to the southern colonies once again. The Royal Governors of Georgia and the Carolinas insisted that large segments of the southern population remained loyal to the Crown and would

rise up in support of British rule under the protection of British regiments.²¹ In December 1778 British troops occupied Savannah, Georgia.²² After the British successfully seized Savannah, they worked to rally Loyalist supporters in Georgia and South Carolina. When the British commander Augustine Prevost led his forces into South Carolina the following June, the Whig governor of South Carolina proposed declaring Charlestowne a neutral city. General Prevost rejected the overture. Ultimately, the southern Continental Army under Benjamin Lincoln chased Prevost back into Georgia and the proposal became moot. Yet Lord Germain saw Prevost's freedom of movement between Savannah and Charlestowne as clear confirmation that a larger contingent of British forces would face little if any opposition from the inhabitants of the region.²³

The key city in the South at that time was Charlestowne, South Carolina the economic and political center for the region. Sir Henry Clinton landed an army near Charlestowne early in 1780 and invested the city from the inland side.²⁴ Heavy British bombardment soon made further resistance futile. On 12 May the trapped American Army of 5,000 under General Benjamin Lincoln surrendered.²⁵ Possession of Charlestowne provided the British with a good port and a base from which to mount their Southern Campaign. Lincoln's surrender was a crushing blow to Patriot hopes and left the Southern Department with no organized resistance of significant size in the field.²⁶

General Clinton did not remain in South Carolina for long after capturing Charlestowne. Citing his fears of a French attack on the British base at New York, Clinton turned over command of the Southern theater to General Cornwallis and departed for New York within days.²⁷ Apparently Sir Henry believed that with the principal city in British hands, the subjugation of South Carolina was all but complete. Events were to

prove him hasty in that judgment. Despite the thorough defeat of the Patriot Army and occupation of Charlestowne, the region was not yet completely under British control. The countryside beyond Charlestowne remained contested at the local level. Cornwallis inherited not a victory, but a campaign that had just begun. The capture of Charlestowne was certainly significant for it provided the British with a base on the sea, interrupted Patriot lines of communication, and eliminated Lincoln's Army, but the greatest challenges remained ahead.

It fell to the Earl Cornwallis and his 2,500 soldiers to pacify the interior region, known as the backcountry. Clinton left him with instructions to set up outposts in the Carolina interior from which to control the countryside. Once Royal authority was reestablished in South Carolina, Cornwallis was to march through North Carolina and ultimately into Virginia to secure those provinces in turn.²⁸ General Clinton's orders to Cornwallis specified the primary importance of defending the British-held areas of South Carolina, but allowed limited offensive operations in support of the general defensive posture. Clinton envisioned a cautious and methodical campaign. Cornwallis, by nature more aggressive than Sir Henry, took the broadest interpretation of Clinton's instructions and focused on moving into North Carolina and Virginia as rapidly as possible.²⁹

Clinton's parting actions rendered Cornwallis' task more difficult. Under the Charlestowne terms of surrender, the Patriot militias and any civilians that had rebelled received full paroles. Clinton revoked all paroles just before he left and issued an ultimatum requiring everyone to swear allegiance to the Crown or be treated as rebels.³⁰ To his mind, this would keep die-hard rebels from subverting British rule while hiding behind the protection of parole. By abrogating his initial policy, General Clinton

unwittingly rekindled popular resistance. Many of those that had acted in opposition to Royal authority were content to take no further active role after the surrender of Charlestowne. Clinton's reversal eliminated this option. His new policy compelled active support of the Crown. Many of these Patriots interpreted the revocation of paroles as a breach of surrender terms, nullifying their own promises not to resist British rule any further.³¹ Clinton's disregard for the fundamental issue of reconciliation undermined the British cause and put a quick end to rebellion in South Carolina out of reach.³²

Another incident that raised fresh animosities in the aftermath of Charlestowne's surrender occurred at a place called the Waxhaws, about one hundred miles from Charlestowne. The British Legion, a light mounted force under Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton, intercepted a column of Patriot reinforcements coming from Virginia. When the Americans refused Tarleton's call to surrender, the British Legion attacked and quickly routed the Patriots. As their lines crumbled the Americans tried to surrender, but Tarleton's troopers did not let up.³³ American survivors claimed that the British troops refused quarter to the Americans that tried to surrender and killed them without restraint. Some of Tarleton's soldiers went so far as to bayonet the American wounded after the battle.³⁴ Word quickly spread and the incident gave rise to the persistent image, real or perceived, of British brutality. The term "Tarleton's quarter"--meaning none--became a rallying cry for anti-British sentiment.³⁵

Lord Cornwallis initially expressed an optimistic outlook for Loyalist support in the South Carolina backcountry.³⁶ Unfortunately, with the capture of Lincoln's army and the Whig government, Tories throughout the province began reprisals against their rebellious neighbors. Nominally representing British authority, Tory militias and bands

took their revenge against the Patriots. These overzealous parties punished their neighbors through torture, summary executions, and destroying or confiscating properties.³⁷ The Loyalists that Cornwallis depended on sparked a fresh wave of civil conflict and instability that directly undermined the British need for establishing control in the region.

A spiraling cycle of retaliation between Carolina Whigs and Tories broke out. The British Army had crushed organized resistance but could not quell the vicious partisan war that followed.³⁸ The British did not fill the void left by the fall of the Whig government in maintaining civil order and the bloodthirsty civil war between Carolina Whigs and Tories ignited anew.³⁹ Much of the conflict was small in scale and isolated, but through June and July of 1780 large bands clashed on several occasions.⁴⁰ Additionally, Thomas Sumter led a hardscrabble militia that directly challenged British control of the countryside. In July, Sumter's forces tenaciously attacked British outposts at Rocky Mount and Hanging Rock.⁴¹ The Patriot cause was at a great disadvantage after Charlestowne, but hope was not extinguished.

In the North, news of Lincoln's defeat generated alarm among Patriot leaders. The Continental Congress quickly appointed Major General Horatio Gates to raise another army in the Southern Department. George Washington felt that General Nathanael Greene was more suited to the task, but Gates' reputation as the victor of Saratoga carried greater weight in Congress.⁴² A contingent of Continentals under Major General Johann De Kalb was camped at Hillsborough, North Carolina. This force had been sent to reinforce Lincoln's Army prior to the surrender of Charlestowne but had not arrived in time. In July of 1780, Gates assumed command of De Kalb's force as the nucleus of the

new Southern Army.⁴³ In addition to De Kalb's regulars, Gates sent out a call for militias and irregulars from around the Carolinas to join his force. Francis Marion and Thomas Sumter responded to the call.⁴⁴ The bulk of the North Carolina militia remained non-committal however.⁴⁵ The army was in critical need of supplies of every sort, including food, armaments, and munitions.⁴⁶ Gates would waste no time taking action.

With his supply problem growing worse the longer he remained at Hillsborough, Gates realized that he needed to rouse popular and official support quickly. He decided to seek a quick and decisive defeat over British forces. When Gates received intelligence that indicated the British garrison at Camden might be vulnerable, he selected that location for his attack.⁴⁷ The city of Camden, South Carolina served as a hub for the road network that joined Charleston to the backcountry and Georgia to the Carolinas.⁴⁸ The British commander at Camden, Lord Rawdon, began concentrating his forces to meet the American threat. Cornwallis sent additional forces to reinforce Rawdon's position. As the British force at Camden grew and Gates' Army approached, it became clear that a decisive engagement was impending. Cornwallis arrived in Camden to assume direct command of the British forces.⁴⁹

General Gates brought an ill-fed and exhausted army to Camden. On the march, American troops had filled their bellies with the only things they could find - unripe corn and green fruit. This diet weakened the Patriot force with dysentery and stomach cramps.⁵⁰ Gates further dissipated his strength by detaching portions of his force to conduct security missions along the outlying avenues of approach. At Sumter's urging, Gates detached four hundred troops to sever the British lines of communication between Camden and Charleston. Additionally, Francis Marion's band of partisans departed to

block British movement on the Santee River.⁵¹ General Gates believed there to be only some seven hundred British troops at Camden. These numbers were derived from outdated intelligence reports.⁵² The total British force actually consisted of about 2,000 soldiers, a little over half of which were Loyalist troops. The American army numbered 3,100.⁵³ Militia comprised two-thirds of Gates' force.⁵⁴

In the early morning hours of 15 August 1780 the American and British armies outside of Camden moved blindly towards each other in the dark, unaware of their proximity. After a meeting engagement between the advance elements, both sides withdrew and regrouped for a dawn attack. Gates drew his forces into a line with the Continentals on the right and his inexperienced militia in the center and left flank. Opposite the American militia Cornwallis' best regular units were posted on the British right, in the traditional place of honor. This arrangement pitted Gates' least capable troops against the best Cornwallis had to offer.⁵⁵

The American militia was skittish from the outset. Most had never before faced the enemy in battle. In short order, the British regulars fired a volley and charged with bayonets.⁵⁶ The British assault panicked the American militia. The American left and center rapidly dissolved, leaving the Continentals hopelessly abandoned. The British force enveloped the American regulars and the battle was quickly decided. Casualties were highest among the Continental ranks, but many of the Americans escaped. In a few short hours, Gates' Army had ceased to exist. The British victory seemed complete.⁵⁷

After dispensing with Gates' army at Camden, General Cornwallis decided to exploit the Americans' disarray. He began preparing to move into North Carolina by sending word to Loyalists in that state to begin assembling and seizing Patriot stores.⁵⁸

With Gates' army destroyed, virtually nothing stood in the way of Cornwallis' northward advance. Horatio Gates sent out pleas to Washington and Congress for reinforcement and supplies.⁵⁹ The remnants of his army, about seven hundred Continentals, mustered at Hillsborough.⁶⁰ Cornwallis moved north to Charlottetowne, North Carolina in mid-September. Major Patrick Ferguson and his Tory militia were operating to the west to suppress Patriot activity in the backcountry and protect Cornwallis' rear and lines of communication.⁶¹ Rather than securing the western reaches of the Carolinas by winning popular confidence, Ferguson provoked intensified resistance.

Ferguson's militia terrorized the western settlements of the Carolinas by sacking the property of those who would not declare allegiance to the King and burning down their homes. Anyone suspected of having borne arms in rebellion was summarily hung.⁶² The harsh tactics of Ferguson's troops against the Whigs of the western Carolinas soon attracted the ire of the self-reliant settlers of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Mountain men began to assemble intent on removing Ferguson's threat to their remote settlements.⁶³ For many backwoods residents, neutrality turned to opposition and resistance. As historian Hank Messick so eloquently stated, "Some men won't fight for liberty, but they will kill to save their cows."⁶⁴

Major Ferguson sent an ultimatum to the frontier communities demanding that all inhabitants cease resistance and submit to Royal authority. Otherwise he would "lay waste" the countryside. Ferguson's notice solidified opposition and prompted men from far across the mountains to assemble in defense of their homelands.⁶⁵ The ad hoc army of backwoodsmen swelled as fresh contingents from every direction joined in the march over the mountains.⁶⁶ As the mountain men poured down out of the highlands, Ferguson

withdrew towards Ninety-Six. Expecting reinforcements that would never come, Major Ferguson led his loyalists to an isolated hilltop known as King's Mountain where he believed he could hold off any Patriot attack.⁶⁷

The mountain men closed in on Ferguson from every direction. On 6 October 1780 Ferguson led his force to the crest of the steep-sided hill. By the next morning, over 3,000 mountaineers surrounded Ferguson's 1,125 men.⁶⁸ Ferguson's pride and his disdain for the capabilities of the untrained mountain men contributed to his destruction.⁶⁹ The mountaineers encircled the mountain and methodically worked their way up the slopes with Ferguson's men trapped on the summit. With no escape available and faced with a withering American crossfire, the Tories surrendered as soon as Major Ferguson was killed.⁷⁰

After the battle of King's Mountain, the mountain men disbanded and filtered back to their settlements. In response to the British loss, Cornwallis withdrew from Charlottetowne to Winnsborough, South Carolina to shorten his lines of communication and pull in his open flank.⁷¹ Thus the tactical loss also comprised a strategic setback for the British commander. Although the mountain men did not represent any sort of organized force, their victory at Kings Mountain demonstrated that British control of South Carolina was by no means secure. Additionally, Ferguson's defeat revived Patriot hopes and suppressed Tory activism in the piedmont and frontier regions.

Following Horatio Gates' crushing defeat at Camden, the Continental Congress came to the conclusion that it was time to replace the Hero of Saratoga. This time, Congress referred the decision to General Washington. Nathanael Greene was Washington's choice for the post all along and now the Commander-in-Chief wasted no

time in appointing Greene to command the Southern Department. Greene traveled through Philadelphia on his way south, pausing long enough to petition Congress in vain for men and material to rebuild the Southern Army. Continuing southward through Maryland and Virginia, General Greene looked to the state governors for assistance and again received none.⁷² He would have to make the best of what was on hand in the Carolinas.

Nathanael Greene assumed command at Charlottetowne, North Carolina in December 1780. With key subordinates and staff officers, Greene immediately set about compiling an exhaustive estimate of the current situation. Out of nearly 1,500 soldiers present for duty, 950 were regulars. He gathered and analyzed data including numbers and locations of available forces, the status of supplies, and a detailed survey of the region's terrain. A comprehensive study of the waterways in the region that he commissioned would pay dividends later. The brisk energy that Nathanael Greene brought to the job quickly infused new life in the dispirited remnants of the army. Logistical efficiency, troop discipline, and morale received his closest attention. As Greene implemented his policies, conditions improved and he gained the increasing confidence of his officers and men.⁷³

Cornwallis' army was arrayed in a series of outposts along a broad crescent running from Ninety-Six in the west, through Winnsboro and Camden to Georgetown on the coast north of Charlestowne. Under Cornwallis' direct command, the largest body of British forces was centrally located at Winnsboro, the apogee of the crescent. From this position, Cornwallis was postured to invade North Carolina.⁷⁴ General Greene sought to deter a British incursion into North Carolina, but knew he lacked the strength to accept

battle. He selected a course of action that gave him the initiative while easing his supply requirements.

The Charlottetowne area could not sustain even Greene's small army after Cornwallis' troops had consumed much of the available provisions. General Greene decided to move the main body of his army to a more suitable location at Cheraw, South Carolina. At the same time, Greene detached part of his army under Brigadier General Daniel Morgan to demonstrate independently on Cornwallis' far flank. This division of forces would inhibit the British commander's freedom of action by forcing him to protect his flanks. Cornwallis responded by sending the British Legion in pursuit of Morgan's force.⁷⁵

With American forces in South Carolina, the British could not claim control of that state. This presence would keep Patriot hopes alive in South Carolina. Additionally, Cornwallis could not advance into North Carolina as long as standing American forces remained to his rear in South Carolina.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, Light Horse Harry Lee's mounted force and Francis Marion's partisan group threatened British lines of communication with the coast. Greene realized that the disposition of his forces provided two important advantages: by dispersing his army he reduced the logistical support required from any one area, and simultaneously he seized the operational initiative.⁷⁷ Greene also insured that he would not have to risk his entire army. Lincoln and Gates had sought victory by concentrating their forces and had lost everything.

On 17 January 1781 Tarleton's British Legion caught up to Daniel Morgan's mixed force of regulars and militia at Cowpens, South Carolina. The British troops had traveled fast across difficult terrain to close with the Americans. Tarleton's men would

arrive tired and hungry, while the Americans had rested well the night before and eaten a solid breakfast that morning. Morgan had spent the night encouraging his troops around the campfires and building their confidence.⁷⁸ Tarleton wanted to catch and destroy Morgan's force before the Americans could cross the Broad River.⁷⁹ No doubt finding Morgan on the near side of the river gave the British commander an added sense of urgency and confidence.

General Morgan prepared his defense on Cowpens' rolling meadows. With his mixed force positioned in three sequential lines of increasing strength, Morgan's dispositions were designed to progressively attrit the enemy force in depth. Tarleton would have to attack up a long broken incline. Morgan positioned a screen of 150 riflemen up front to slow and disrupt the British advance and force Tarleton to deploy early. A second line of militiamen formed midway up the slope with a third and stronger line of regulars and militia just over the crest.⁸⁰ Understanding the propensity of militia to panic and break early on in conventional battle, Morgan had instructed the militia line to fire two volleys and they could withdraw behind the main line after that.⁸¹

Tarleton played his role in accordance with Morgan's plan. After the American skirmishers engaged the British advanced guard, Tarleton deployed his forces into battle formation. The British line consisted of infantry with cavalry on the flanks and two small field guns in the center. The line of skirmishers fell back as the British pressed forward. After exchanging volleys with the American militia, the British line charged forward with bayonets. The militia in the second line withdrew according to plan. The British troops thought that the American force had broken and hurried forward in disordered pursuit. Suddenly, as the British crested the hilltop, they ran headlong into the waiting American

third line composed of fresh regulars and militia. The Americans poured a devastating fire into the British ranks. At the same time, the reformed militia from the second line added their firepower to the fray. The American cavalry completed the counterattack by sweeping in on the British flank. Tarleton's Legion quickly collapsed.⁸²

Morgan's presence had threatened the British garrison at Ninety-Six and prevented Cornwallis from moving north. These results supported Greene's intent of seizing the initiative. With scanty resources and Tarleton's Legion in pursuit, Morgan deferred battle until conditions favored the Patriot forces. At the Battle of Cowpens, General Morgan employed the diverse capabilities of regular and militia troops in concerted fashion to upset Tarleton's superior force.⁸³ Daniel Morgan achieved at the tactical level what Nathanael Greene would accomplish at the operational and strategic level.

The astonishing American victory at Cowpens provided a tremendous boost to Patriot morale. Conversely, Tarleton's defeat seriously dampened Loyalist enthusiasm and deprived Lord Cornwallis of a significant portion of his strength. Cornwallis immediately took up pursuit of Morgan's small force, but Morgan had moved quickly away from the Cowpens and slipped into North Carolina to link up with Greene's main body. Making excellent use of the terrain, Greene eluded Cornwallis' grasp in a month-long flight across North Carolina. Greene had prepared well. His initial river surveys gave him a detailed knowledge of the best fords where he had emplaced boats in advance. The British, encumbered by their heavy supply trains, could not catch up to the Americans. At Ramsour's Mill, Cornwallis burned his baggage trains to sustain a faster pace. This left the British troops with no option to confiscating supplies from local

residents along the route, an activity that quickly alienated the populace. Greene finally crossed the Dan River into Virginia and Cornwallis withdrew to Hillsborough, North Carolina to reconsolidate.⁸⁴

In early March 1781, Greene returned to North Carolina with reinforcements. Cornwallis immediately moved to intercept the American force.⁸⁵ The two armies met on 15 March at Guilford Courthouse. General Greene adopted Morgan's successful tactics and deployed in three lines of increasing strength.⁸⁶ Cornwallis rushed his army into the attack without fully reconnoitering the terrain or the American dispositions. The British Army advanced across open cornfields into the American fire. Despite taking heavy losses, the British charged the American first rank with bayonets and the Patriot militia broke and ran. Thickly wooded terrain disrupted the British lines as they approached the American second rank. The disorganized British force met heavy resistance from the Virginia militia, but eventually forced their way through. Fighting at the third American line was the bloodiest part of the day. Momentum swung from one to side to the other and back again until Cornwallis finally ordered his artillery to fire through his own ranks to smash the American line. The Americans were forced to retire. Although Cornwallis won the field, it was a costly victory for the British.⁸⁷

Following Guilford Courthouse, Cornwallis moved the remnants of his army to Wilmington on the coast where he had the advantage of sea lines of communication with Clinton in the North. This left Greene free to operate throughout the interior of the Carolinas and begin taking control of the region from the remaining British garrisons. In April 1781 Cornwallis ceded the Carolinas to the Patriots and moved his army north to the Chesapeake. On a narrow peninsula between the York and James Rivers, Cornwallis

established his battered army at Yorktown, Virginia, where he expected to join a larger British force. Yorktown turned out to be a dead end for the Earl Cornwallis. In October, following a French naval blockade and a landward siege, Cornwallis was compelled to surrender to a combined Franco-American army under George Washington. The Southern Campaign had set the stage for Washington's strategic victory and United States' independence.

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⁵Jeremy Black, *War for America* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), 5.

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⁸John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 3-16.

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¹⁰Ward, 292-301.

¹¹Black, 110-113.

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¹³Pancake, 3.

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- ²¹Burke Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1962), 10-11.
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- ²⁵*Ibid.*, 69-71.
- ²⁶Thomas E. Baker, *Another Such Victory* (New York: Publishing Center for Cultural Resources for Eastern Acorn Press, 1981), 5.
- ²⁷Pancake, 68-69; and Davis, 11.
- ²⁸Ward, 704.
- ²⁹Messick, 44.
- ³⁰Pancake, 66, 70.
- ³¹Smith, 131-133; and Buchanan, 72.
- ³²Black 189-190.
- ³³Pancake, 70-71.
- ³⁴Messick, 42.
- ³⁵Buchanan, 84-85.
- ³⁶Black, 190.
- ³⁷John. Fiske, *The American Revolution*, vol.2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1891), 181.

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³⁹Pancake, 71.

⁴⁰Buchanan, 106-115.

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⁴²Fiske, 185-186.

⁴³Pancake, 98-100.

⁴⁴Robert D. Bass, *The Swamp Fox: The Life and Campaigns of General Francis Marion* (New York : Holt, 1959), 36, 39.

⁴⁵Pancake, 100.

⁴⁶Fiske, 187.

⁴⁷Pancake, 100.

⁴⁸Fiske, 182.

⁴⁹Bass, 36-39.

⁵⁰Fiske, 188-189.

⁵¹Bass, 39-40.

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⁵⁴Pancake, 103.

⁵⁵Buchanan, 161-165.

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⁵⁸Messick, 53.

⁵⁹Pancake, 108.

⁶⁰Black, 193.

- ⁶¹Pancake, 115-117.
- ⁶²Messick, 152.
- ⁶³Pancake, 115-117.
- ⁶⁴Messick, 58.
- ⁶⁵Ibid., 80.
- ⁶⁶Ibid., 119.
- ⁶⁷Ibid., 113, 121-124.
- ⁶⁸Fiske, 246.
- ⁶⁹Messick, 30, 61.
- ⁷⁰Ibid., 135-147.
- ⁷¹Fiske, 246-249.
- ⁷²Buchanan, 274-275.
- ⁷³Pancake, 129-130.
- ⁷⁴Babits, 5.
- ⁷⁵Baker, 18.
- ⁷⁶Babits, 7-8.
- ⁷⁷Black, 209.
- ⁷⁸Davis, 21-28.
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- ⁸⁰Babits, 72-77.
- ⁸¹Roberts, 76.
- ⁸²Babits, 119.
- ⁸³Ibid., 9-10.
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⁸⁵Ibid., 30.

⁸⁶Davis, 148.

⁸⁷Baker, 50-73.

CHAPTER 3

BRITISH CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

This chapter explores elements of the operational design inherent in the British campaign strategy for the Southern Campaign. No detailed written campaign plan was produced, as was the norm in that period, but the general outlines of what we would consider a campaign plan are discernable in a study of the contemporary correspondence, and thorough analysis of British actions. The campaign objectives did support the overall British war aims and General Clinton developed a reasonably logical campaign plan. Nonetheless, the British failed in the South because they misread the Patriot centers of gravity and did not focus their resources on attaining their preliminary objective of raising effective Loyalist militias.

As stated in the previous discussion on methodology, this chapter will examine and evaluate British strategy for the Southern Campaign in terms of the linkage between ends, ways, and means. The ends consist of desired end states and objectives. Operational objectives are derived from enemy centers of gravity and decisive points. The operational concept comprises the ways. The means are the physical and moral resources and how they are employed in relation to each other to achieve the desired effects. At the conclusion of this chapter, the British ends, ways, and means will be assessed for feasibility, acceptability, and suitability.

The British concept for the Southern Campaign made sense given their perspective on warfare in the Eighteenth Century European context. Generals Clinton and Cornwallis prosecuted the campaign under vastly different conditions than those of European battlefields however. To some degree the British commanders recognized that

differences did exist and attempted to modify their approach to the campaign to account for such differences. With hindsight it is relatively easy to identify multiple factors that they overlooked, factors that may be clear to us today but were less so at the time. The British commanders in the South neglected some aspects of the campaign, failed to realize the importance of others, and misapplied their available resources in still other cases.

The ends sought by the British in the Southern Campaign centered on two key assumptions that proved at least partially erroneous. Reports of Loyalists eager to rise up against Patriot dominance encouraged British authorities to build a campaign plan around Loyalist forces that did not yet exist.¹ To be sure, Loyalists represented a greater segment of the population in the southern states than elsewhere, yet British expectations of the Loyalists' readiness to shoulder the burdens of quelling the rebellion were probably exaggerated. Another false assumption was that destruction of the Continental Army in the South would end resistance to Royal authority in the region. The resilience and persistence of Patriot militia and irregular groups denied the British any long-term advantage from the total defeat of two consecutive American armies.

British ministers in London envisioned a decisive campaign in the South that would open the way for strategic victory in the war. The grand strategic aim seemed simple enough. The British government's desired end state to the campaign was the complete restoration of Royal control from Georgia to the Chesapeake. With control of South Carolina and Georgia, the British Army would have a secure base from which to mount follow-on expeditions north through North Carolina and into Virginia, Delaware and Maryland.² Possession of the Carolinas and Virginia would provide Britain with

access to vital resources to support the war while denying such resources to the Continental Army.³ Additionally, secure ports in the Carolinas would facilitate concurrent naval operations against the French in the West Indies.⁴ The Southern Campaign seemed to be Britain's best option to bring the war to a conclusion and shift her focus to the growing conflict with France.

Success in the Southern Campaign implicitly offered the British an opportunity to box in the rebellion and reduce it geometrically. A belligerent that gains control of three sides of a zone of operations has a significant positional advantage over his opponent. Therefore, operations that aim at gaining such dominance can be decisive.⁵ In the War for American Independence, Great Britain's control of Canada and the Atlantic Ocean gave her control of two sides of the theater. The mountains served as a natural barrier in the west. The South comprised the fourth side of the strategic perimeter. By seizing control of the southern states, the British would effectively enclose Patriot resistance within an imaginary box that could be systematically contracted. As British control expanded from the south, other British forces would push from the north until Washington's army could be brought to battle and destroyed.

Theater level or operational objectives are those overarching goals designed to achieve the desired end states of a campaign. By extension, operational objectives support the national military objectives of the war. In Britain's Southern Campaign, the theater level objectives reflected the basic justification for launching a campaign in the South. After gaining a beachhead, raising Loyalist militia forces represented the first British operational objective.⁶ Loyalist forces did not exist in effective numbers in South Carolina by 1780. Patriot militia units had violently suppressed overt manifestations of

Loyalism in the years since the failed British expedition of 1776.⁷ The British Army would have to build new Loyalist forces practically from the ground up because Loyalist support was central to the success of the new campaign.

The second British operational objective was to gain control of South Carolina. Within the southern region of the colonies, South Carolina occupied a central position geographically as well as economically and politically. South Carolina served as the linchpin of the South. British leaders believed that possession of South Carolina would induce the rapid submission of Georgia and North Carolina because these states were economically tied to South Carolina.⁸ Additionally, the British believed that although the populations of these two neighboring provinces were generally loyal, they had been intimidated into inaction by South Carolina Whigs.⁹ Control of South Carolina would begin the process that would expand Royal authority into the remainder of the South.

The Continental Army of the Southern Department, including its adjunct militias, constituted the third theater-level objective for the British.¹⁰ By themselves, Patriot militia groups did not constitute a significant threat in the eyes of British commanders.¹¹ Even alongside regular troops the value of militia seemed dubious. More often than not, militia soldiers were the first to break in battle and commanders on both sides disparaged the militia as unreliable and more trouble than they were worth.¹² Nor did British officers hold the Continental regulars in particularly high esteem. Nonetheless, the British Army clearly had to destroy this force in order to claim unchallenged control in South Carolina. Loyalist militia would suffice to counter the Patriot militia threat, but so long as the Americans maintained a standing army in the field, British control would be challenged.

While eighteenth century officers like General Clinton and General Cornwallis were unfamiliar with the term “center of gravity,” it is likely that they would have understood grasped the concept clearly. Military operations of their day hinged on reducing an opponent’s source of strength, no less than it does today. The craft, then as now, lies in identifying what the centers of gravity are. The British clearly recognized that Charlestowne was both a political and economic center of gravity for the Americans.¹³ When Sir Henry returned to New York, he instructed Cornwallis to protect Charlestowne above all else because of its vital importance as a logistics base to sustain the army as well as its value as a political symbol.¹⁴ They also identified the Patriot Army as the American military center of gravity.¹⁵ Fate smiled on Clinton’s enterprise when General Lincoln contracted his army into the confines of Charlestowne. The surrender of Lincoln’s force along with the city in May of 1780 gave General Clinton a multi-faceted triumph. British jubilation and optimism were understandable. Yet the campaign’s auspicious beginning also marked the highpoint for British fortunes.

Less than a year after the victory at Charlestowne, Cornwallis’ dispirited and exhausted British forces would abandon the Carolinas leaving only a handful of small garrisons defending the backcountry outposts and holding on to Charlestowne.¹⁶ The Americans had not folded after Charlestowne. Nor had the Americans capitulated following the utter destruction of a second American army at Camden. British leaders had never imagined that Patriot resistance in the South would prove so resilient and so persistent. This oversight stemmed from the preconception that militia soldiers and irregular partisan bands represented nothing more than a tactical nuisance.¹⁷ Nothing in the British leaders’ training or experience had prepared them to view irregular forces in

any other way. It is also worth noting that this perspective was not exclusive to the British, as many senior American officers in the Continental Army shared the same prejudice with good reason.¹⁸ Furthermore, General Cornwallis became so fixated on Nathanael Greene's Army as the American center of gravity that he seems to have lost sight of all else.¹⁹ Although Patriot militias consistently denied the British control of the countryside, British commanders overlooked militias as an American center of gravity at the theater level.

In the Carolinas, irregular forces served as an essential source of power for the Patriot cause in the South. Following the surrender of Lincoln's Army and again after the annihilation of Gates' force at Camden, Patriot militias kept unrelenting pressure on British and Loyalist forces across the state. In the absence of any American regular force, irregulars such as those led by Francis Marion and Thomas Sumter comprised the only organized Patriot resistance active in the theater.²⁰ The effects of these militia operations were out of all proportion to the numbers of militia soldiers involved. Partisan style raids continuously threatened British lines of communication and foraging parties.²¹ Patriot militia isolated the backcountry garrisons Cornwallis had scattered around the state and denied the British effective control of the interior.²² Most importantly, Patriot companies maliciously persecuted Tories and repeatedly attacked Loyalist militias.²³ By suppressing Loyalist activism, the Patriot militias were directly responsible for denying the British one of their principal operational objectives.

Often the intangible aspects of an army's power are the most difficult to discern, much less to target effectively. Not all of the Americans' capabilities derived from physical formations or locations. British leaders, secure in the superior quantity and

quality of their forces, did not design their operations to diminish the Patriots' nonmaterial strength or advantages. One of these intangible centers of gravity directly related to the tenacity of the Patriot militia groups. The will to fight comprised a fundamental source of Patriot strength. British strategy aimed at fostering the Loyalist will to fight but in general neglected the existence of Patriot resolve as a serious factor. The British attitude was shaped by the belief that most inhabitants were Loyalists at heart and only lacked the protection of British arms to come forth and openly demonstrate faithfulness.²⁴ In this regard, British leaders miscalculated not only the degree of Loyalist support upon which they could count, but also the depth of resistance they faced. The hardiness of the American will to fight is best illustrated by their perseverance in challenging the British Army despite repetitive crushing defeats.

A vague desire to foster conciliation was the only British measure that aimed to diminish Patriot will.²⁵ Unfortunately, the actions of Tories and British leaders themselves made reconciliation an unattainable object. Clinton's proclamation that all inhabitants must swear allegiance and serve in the Loyalist militia caused irreparable damage to his hopes of reconciliation.²⁶ Vengeful Tories, as well as junior commanders such as Tarleton and Ferguson also incited American resistance through their brutal actions. Cornwallis' dependence on foraging, that frequently turned to pillaging, added to the disaffection of the populace.²⁷ Even though senior British leaders expressed a desire to mitigate the Patriot will to fight with conciliatory gestures, their own deeds and those of their subordinates contradicted this goal.

In the opening stages of the campaign, two Patriot armies attempted to meet the British Army on equal terms to no avail. The lessons were not lost on Patriot militia

leaders who realized that the Americans had to play to their own strengths.²⁸ American units enjoyed a marked advantage over the British in terms of operational mobility. Operational mobility refers to the capacity to advance and withdraw across distances to achieve a favorable position relative to the enemy force, not simply to the mode of transportation employed. The Americans used their loose organizational structure, as well as the geography and population, to mass and disperse as needed for positional advantage over the British.²⁹ This capability afforded militia leaders, and later General Greene, with an agility that Cornwallis could not match. This form of operational mobility constituted another American center of gravity because it allowed Patriot leaders to seize the initiative by striking and evading the British practically at will.

According to current military doctrine, once a commander has determined the enemy centers of gravity, he identifies the decisive points to bring his force to bear and gain a potentially decisive advantage over the enemy. Success at the decisive point opens the way to victory by neutralizing or removing an enemy center of gravity.³⁰ Observing where the British focused their military efforts provides clear insight into what they considered their decisive points even if they never used the term itself. British leaders seemed to believe that bringing the American Army to battle would suffice as a decisive point. Once the British Army engaged the Americans, victory would surely follow and the center of gravity would be removed.³¹ The capture of Charlestowne and Lincoln's Army was the decisive point of the initial phase of the campaign in the Carolinas, and seemed to bear out the British approach towards the decisive point. Yet the Americans persisted in regenerating armies and the British had to pursue the same decisive point

repeatedly. Horatio Gates proved most obliging to the British in this undertaking, but Nathanael Greene's obstinacy thoroughly confounded the Earl Cornwallis.

Ironically, the preoccupation with forcing the Continental Army to fight distracted British attention and efforts from what may have been a more appropriate decisive point. Once control of Charlestowne was attained, the next step was supposed to be the expansion of British rule into the backcountry.³² Cornwallis' chain of outposts was supposed to have begun that process by serving as bases for operations in the interior and for Loyalist recruiting and training.³³ Yet the outposts did not actually control the countryside. Patriot militias and partisans continued to operate relatively freely throughout the Carolinas.³⁴ Control of the countryside would have directly met one of the British campaign objectives. Additionally, mastering the backcountry would have required effective measures to quell the Patriot militias and consequently would have neutralized that American center of gravity. The Patriot's operational mobility would also have been reduced or nullified with British control of the countryside. Such dominance would also have built up Tory confidence and established the most favorable conditions for marshalling Loyalist support.

An operational concept articulates the intended implementation of a campaign strategy in generalized terms. The British operational concept for the Southern Campaign was based on the use of Loyalist forces to augment the British Army as an economy of force measure. The British Army was to seize Charlestowne and then move into the interior, pacifying the province in small portions. As the army pacified each area, Loyalist militias would be employed to maintain security while the army proceeded on to pacify the next area.³⁵ This scheme created a symbiotic relationship between the British

Army and Loyalist militias. The army's presence would allow the Loyalists to rise, and the Loyalist militias would free the army to move on to other areas with their rear and lines of communication secure.³⁶ This overall concept tied together the campaign objectives and the resources available to them. Put into modern terms, the concept expresses the relationship between ends, ways, and means. By design the British operational concept would require time, patience, restraint, and deliberate processes.

In the event, Cornwallis and his subordinates proved impatient, impulsive, and at times rash and unrestrained. These characteristics played an important role in the discontinuity between ends, ways, and means in the British execution of the campaign. Cornwallis' focus on the American Army drove him to pursue a course of action that disregarded the Americans' most effective center of gravity, the Patriot militias. Consequently, he ceded control of the countryside and could not achieve his operational objectives. General Cornwallis in effect abandoned the operational concept and proceeded with no coherent plan or vision as a substitute other than to catch and defeat Nathanael Greene's force. When Cornwallis finally did best the American Army at Guilford Courthouse, the victory proved so costly that his army was incapable of continuing operations further.³⁷ General Cornwallis won the field but no other advantage. What was a tactical victory amounted to an operational loss.

The British plan for the Southern Campaign was, in effect, a phased operation. British strategy was conceived as a progression of steps leading to full control of the South. According to the overall design, the British Army would apply the operational concept in phases by establishing a base, pacifying the countryside incrementally, and employing Loyalist militia to maintain the peace.³⁸ In 1779, General Clinton dispatched a

small force to invest Savannah, Georgia and then expand operations into the Georgia interior to rally Loyalists to the Royal cause.³⁹ This expedition tested the precepts of the operational concept. While the British forces captured the coastal city of Savannah easily enough, the subsequent foray into the backcountry failed entirely.⁴⁰ With little consideration for the implications of these mixed results, General Clinton plunged ahead into the second phase in South Carolina.

South Carolina seemed to offer the best opportunities of success for the British operational concept. Initial successes, including the capture of Charlestowne and the early rush of Loyalist recruitment, reinforced British confidence in their plan.⁴¹ Possession of Charlestowne was a critical first phase because it provided the British with access to the sea, facilities to establish logistical support, dominance over political administration and denied these same assets to the Americans. Cornwallis then deployed garrisons at a string of outposts in the backcountry to support the area pacification efforts and serve as centers of Loyalist recruiting and training.⁴² In the North, the British had discovered that Loyalists would only muster when regular British forces were on hand to protect them.⁴³ Following the restoration of Royal control in South Carolina, the British Army would move north into North Carolina and repeat the process. With the Carolinas secure, Cornwallis was to advance north to the Chesapeake Bay area and join with another British Army from the northern states in the reduction of Virginia. This was the British concept as originally conceived by Lord Germain and promulgated by Sir Henry Clinton.⁴⁴ It was never fully implemented however. General Cornwallis preferred a more aggressive approach and he got his chance.⁴⁵ Unfortunately for the British, Cornwallis' execution only widened the gap between British ends and means.

Following the American victory at Cowpens, Cornwallis impetuously quit the campaign plan and plunged his army into North Carolina well before the intended conditions had been established.⁴⁶ This premature invasion left the British Army surrounded by an inhospitable populace, a fact that became the more significant after Cornwallis destroyed the baggage trains.⁴⁷ The British commander's determination to catch Nathanael Greene's Army was wholly inconsistent with the objectives and planned sequence of the campaign. Following the battle of Guilford Courthouse, Cornwallis ended up removing the bulk of his army to Virginia without coordinating the movement with General Clinton.⁴⁸ In effect, Cornwallis abandoned the Carolinas without ever having applied the elements of the British operational concept.

The British had limited but potent assets available to carry out their operational concept and achieve the campaign objectives yet their efforts came to nothing. This failure was in part a result of insufficient means. Cornwallis commanded a force of something over 3,000 men. With this relatively small army, he was supposed to accomplish a great deal. In addition to defending Charlestowne, Cornwallis was expected to mount wide-ranging operations. Before Sir Henry Clinton returned to New York, he left instructions for Lord Cornwallis to maintain British gains in Georgia, pacify South Carolina, and eventually recover North Carolina. At the same time, Clinton expected Cornwallis to provide some 3,000 troops for operations in the Chesapeake region at some indefinite time in the future.⁴⁹ Clearly Cornwallis would have to rely on Loyalist militias to carry some of the burden.

The southern strategy was predicated on increasing the means available through raising Loyalist militias. There were two separate assumptions embedded in this premise.

First, the British assumed that reports of Loyalist numbers in the South were accurate. Second, and perhaps more importantly, they assumed that these Loyalists would be willing to actively participate in the restoration of British rule.⁵⁰ To whatever degree the first assumption was valid, it was entirely moot if the second assumption was not valid. The difference between numbers of Loyalists in the South and numbers of Loyalists willing to take up arms on behalf of the Crown may have been a critical miscalculation for the British. Additionally, indiscriminate property confiscations that occurred under the guise of foraging alienated many otherwise amenable inhabitants and cost the British an untold degree of popular support.⁵¹

Cornwallis' efforts to raise Loyalists militias were also undermined by a lack of material. The task of raising militias included equipping and arming them, yet no such resources were provided by the British Government. Without weapons and equipment General Cornwallis could not build effective Loyalist units to counter the prolific Patriot militias and guerrilla bands that operated freely across the Carolinas.⁵² Cornwallis' inability to offer sufficient food, arms, ammunition, or cavalry equipment disillusioned many of those Loyalists that did muster for service. Most importantly, the unabated Patriot militia threat deterred Loyalist activism.⁵³ Although the campaign relied on the Loyalist base of support, the British did not optimize the Loyalists. Consequently, Lord Cornwallis never had the militia resources envisioned to reach the operational objectives and attain the desired end state.

The British Army also fell short of its potential. The far-flung dispositions of backcountry detachments precluded mutual support, increased vulnerability, and made it difficult to mass against the Americans. The British reliance on communications with

their logistics base limited their operational range and speed of movement. When Cornwallis cut his supply lines and burned his trains to increase his mobility, he hastened the culmination of his army. Ultimately, Greene's escape across the Dan River left Cornwallis with no choice but to take an operational pause at Hillsborough. An operational pause earlier and on his own terms would have allowed Cornwallis to husband the strength of his army until such time as the Patriots could have been brought to battle.

The British Army centered its attention and expended its energies in pursuit of the Patriot Army under Nathanael Greene rather than eliminating the threat posed by Patriot militias. This oversight undermined the basic premise of the British campaign plan and contributed directly to their culmination and failure. The underlying assumptions that drove British campaign planning did not hold up under the pressure of a constant partisan threat. While there may have been a significant segment of the Carolina populace that would have welcomed or at least accepted British rule, there were insufficient Loyalists committed enough to rise up in active support.⁵⁴ This disappointing fact proved especially true in the face of the zealous Patriot militias' suppression efforts. These Patriot militias played such an important role in denying British control that they actually constituted a principal center of gravity for the Americans.

Since British commanders failed to acknowledge the scope of the American militias' impact, British operations did not aim at reducing such irregular threats. Cornwallis never controlled the countryside because he did not focus on countering the Patriot militias with effective Loyalist militias as called for in the campaign plan. Instead, he devoted his resources to chasing the Continental Army of the South. When Cornwallis

left the Carolinas in March of 1781, he left nothing but an estranged population and isolated pockets of British control scattered around South Carolina. There were no Loyalist militias in the field and no pacified areas.⁵⁵

In summary, the British campaign plan followed the general outlines of modern operational design. Britain's political objective of retaining the colonies determined the national military objectives of destroying the American military capability. The theater-level objective of restoring Royal authority in the South supported the national objectives by aiming at isolating the Continental Army in the North and denying the northern states resources from the South. Additionally, control of the South supported British war aims against the French by providing a base of operations for a campaign in the West Indies. The planned ends for the Southern Campaign were suitable in that they did directly support attainment of British national war aims. Cornwallis lost sight of these ends however and focused on the narrower objective of decisive battle to destroy the American army.

The British concept of operations focused on American centers of gravity including the political and economic center of Charlestowne, and the Patriot Army in the Southern Department. Charlestowne, destruction of the American Army, and control of the countryside were the decisive points. For the most part, the planned ways supported the desired ends with the fatal exception of addressing the Patriot militia as an American center of gravity.

The operational concept entailed seizing Charlestowne, pacifying the interior in deliberate fashion while raising Loyalist militias, and employing Loyalist forces to secure the pacified areas as the army moved on to subsequent areas repeating the process until

all of South Carolina was under British authority. The principal phases were to have been the establishment of a lodgment at Charlestowne, pacification of South Carolina, pacification of North Carolina, and invasion of Virginia. Although in the end, losing the campaign brought British defeat in the war, the British war effort was crumbling before the Southern Campaign. Lord North recognized the fact that the campaign in the South was his government's last hope for victory. In a sense, the British had nothing to lose. Therefore, the ways component of the British campaign strategy did meet the acceptability test because the potential gains did outweigh the potential costs.

The primary resources available to apply to this concept included the British Army, sea power, logistical support, popular support and the Loyalists. Lord Cornwallis did not use these resources, or means, effectively to achieve the campaign objectives. He relied almost exclusively on the army, and failed to cultivate popular support or raise effective Loyalist militias. The less Cornwallis integrated these resources, the less available they became. Consequently, his army was overburdened by fighting a conventional war and an unconventional war simultaneously. In effect, Cornwallis was overwhelmed by compound warfare and was unable to match his means to the desired ends. While the Southern Campaign may have been suitable and even acceptable to the British, it was not feasible with the means available. General Cornwallis' failure to synchronize the means at his disposal only made the campaign less feasible.

This chapter disaggregated and evaluated the British campaign strategy. While Eighteenth Century British leaders did not use modern terminology, there is ample evidence that their mental process bore a close resemblance to current models of strategy

formulation. The British failed in the South because their campaign plan was not entirely feasible to begin with and in its execution became increasingly less so.

¹Ira Gruber, "Britain's Southern Strategy," *The Revolutionary War in the South*, ed. W. Robert Higgins (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979), 218-219.

²Clyde R. Ferguson, "Carolina and Georgia Patriot and Loyalist Militia in Action, 1778-1783," *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution*, ed. Jeffrey Crow, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 176; and Shy, 200.

³Governor Sir James Wright to General Sir Henry Clinton, 3 February 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution 1770-1783, Colonial Office Series*, vol. XVIII, *Transcripts 1780*, ed. K.G. Davies (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1978), 45-47.

⁴Smith, 88.

⁵Lamar Tooke, "Formulating a Theater Strategic Concept of Operations" *Military Review*, June 1994, 10.

⁶Shy, 203.

⁷Ferguson, 176.

⁸Governor Sir James Wright to General Sir Henry Clinton, 3 February 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. XVII, 46.

⁹Smith, 84.

¹⁰Robert S. Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 112-113.

¹¹John D. Waghelstein, "Regulars, Irregulars and Militia: The American Revolution," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 6, no. 2 (autumn 1995), 137.

¹²Don Higginbotham, "The American Militia: A Traditional Institution with Revolutionary Responsibilities," *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War*, ed. Don Higginbotham (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 90; Ferguson, 186; and Lieutenant General Earl Cornwallis to General Sir Henry Clinton, 14 July 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. 17, 119.

¹³Lord George Germain to General Sir Henry Clinton, 19 January 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution*. vol. XVII, 36.

¹⁴Buchanan, 72.

¹⁵Lord George Germaine to Governor Patrick Tonyn, 19 January 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. XVII, 40; Governor Josiah Martin to Lord George Germaine, 18 August 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. 17, 139-140.

¹⁶Theodore Thayer, *Nathanael Greene: Strategist of the American Revolution* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1960), 340.

¹⁷Waghelstein, 136.

¹⁸Robert C. Pugh, "The Revolutionary Militia in the Southern Campaign, 1780-1781," *William & Mary Quarterly* 14 (April 1957): 157-158.

¹⁹Lieutenant General Earl Cornwallis to Lord George Germain, 17 March 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol.20, 85-90.

²⁰Waghelstein, 141.

²¹Franklin Wickwire and Mary Wickwire, *Cornwallis: The American Adventure* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 241; R. Arthur Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America, 1775-1783* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 90-91; and Pugh, 167.

²²Buchanan, 131-137; and Bowler, 90-91.

²³Wickwire and Wickwire, 170.

²⁴Bowler, 50.

²⁵General Sir Henry Clinton to Lord George Germaine, 13 May 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. 17, 88.

²⁶Smith, 131-133.

²⁷Bowler, 154.

²⁸Buchanan, 177, 181, 193; and Pugh, 160-161.

²⁹Pugh, 165-166.

³⁰US Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, 5-7.

³¹Lieutenant General Earl Cornwallis to Lord George Germain, 14 July 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. 17, 119.

³²General Sir Henry Clinton to Lord George Germaine, 14 May 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. 17, 90-91.

- ³³Wickwire, 137; and Smith, 133-137.
- ³⁴Pugh, 164; and Ferguson, 185-186.
- ³⁵Shy, 199.
- ³⁶Lambert, 94.
- ³⁷Lieutenant General Earl Cornwallis to General Sir Henry Clinton, 10 April 1781, *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. 20, 107.
- ³⁸Gruber, 217, 227; Lord George Germaine to Sir James Wright, 19 January 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. 17, 37; General Sir Henry Clinton to Lord George Germaine, 14 May 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. 17, 90-91.
- ³⁹Smith, 100-106.
- ⁴⁰Shy, 204; and Ferguson, 178-183.
- ⁴¹General Sir Henry Clinton to Lord George Germaine, 4 June 1780, *Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. 17, 101-102.
- ⁴²Wickwire and Wickwire, 137; and Smith, 133-137.
- ⁴³Babits, 1.
- ⁴⁴Gruber, 217.
- ⁴⁵Lambert, 131.
- ⁴⁶Wickwire and Wickwire, 171-172.
- ⁴⁷Pancake, 161, 172; and Wickwire and Wickwire, 274-285.
- ⁴⁸Smith, 154-155.
- ⁴⁹Wickwire, 134-135.
- ⁵⁰Lambert, 94.
- ⁵¹Bowler, 78-81, 154.
- ⁵²*Ibid.*, 151-152.
- ⁵³Ferguson, 188; and Pugh, 167.
- ⁵⁴Lambert, 129, 146, 164.

⁵⁵Ibid., 167-171; and Wickwire and Wickwire, 319-321.

CHAPTER 4

AMERICAN CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

American strategy in the Southern Campaign is the focus of this chapter. The American operational design for the Southern Campaign is a challenge to bring out because of the changes in leadership and consequent shifts in strategy. For each successive American commander, elements of the operational design are evident to varying degrees, but overall American strategy in the South was disjointed. Nathanael Greene's time in command covered a longer and more active period, and he achieved far greater success than his predecessors. For these reasons, Greene's strategy emerges with greater clarity and cohesion. American strategic objectives remained constant although Benjamin Lincoln and Horatio Gates failed to perceive the linkages to theater objectives. As a result, two American armies suffered destruction. Despite these setbacks, and against all odds, Nathanael Greene managed to pick up the pieces and put together an effective strategy.

This chapter will follow the same format as the previous chapter in analyzing and appraising American strategy in the Southern Campaign. Ends, ways, and means are discussed in terms of operational design. Each element of operational design will include discussion of applicability to each American general that commanded the Southern Department. The feasibility of the means, acceptability of the ways, and suitability of the ends will be addressed at the chapter conclusion.

American strategy for the Southern Campaign evolved in fits and starts. Even though the British campaign plan may have had its flaws, it was a fairly coherent design. For the Americans, the campaign in the Carolinas was characterized by a series of

leadership turnovers that produced frequent changes to the strategic direction. This lack of continuity was exacerbated by a severe shortage of resources to conduct the campaign with. National political and military objectives remained dependent on the survival of George Washington's army in the North. Washington had little he could spare without incurring greater risks to the Northern Army. Congress and the states were strapped as well due to the severe economic crisis that had rendered the Continental currency worthless.¹ As a result, the Southern Department received little external assistance. Each successive American commander had to figure out for himself how to mount an effort that would support the national military effort. In the end, General Nathanael Greene finally got it right. Greene astutely applied his available means to achieve campaign objectives that directly supported the national goals.

From the American perspective, the Southern campaign was divided into five distinct periods. The three primary periods consisted of operations under Generals Lincoln, Gates and Greene. These periods were separated by voids in organized resistance following the American defeats at Charlestowne and Camden. During these intermissions, irregular bands and militias comprised the only resistance in the South. Fighting independently, these groups usually pursued their own agendas rather than objectives linked to higher campaign or war aims. This chapter examines the elements of American strategy in each of the three primary periods based on a review and analysis of primary and secondary sources. Both General Lincoln and General Gates tried and failed to win the campaign by facing the British on symmetrical terms. Where Lincoln and Gates did not apply the means available to them in consonance with American grand strategy, Nathanael Greene ultimately did.

George Washington, as Commander-in-Chief, was responsible for designing a national military strategy that supported the American political objective of independence. Articulating such a concept to his subordinate commander in the Southern Department was made difficult by distance. The same constraint limited Washington's comprehension of current conditions in the South. Without knowing the situation for himself, Washington had to rely on the commander of the Southern Department to make his own decisions. Nonetheless, both Lincoln and Gates unwittingly made fatal deviations from national objectives. Breaking the British will to fight and attaining foreign assistance were Washington's overarching strategic objectives that supported the ultimate goal of national independence.² Lincoln and Gates both pursued strategies that failed to support Washington's objectives.

Following the British capture of Savannah, Washington warned General Lincoln that the British would likely widen their campaign in the South. Washington noted that a southern campaign offered the most lucrative employment Britain could make of her army and he accurately outlined British motives for such an endeavor. With "the *full* possession of Georgia and the acquisition of South Carolina," the British could greatly improve their position relative to France, as well as for ultimate peace negotiations with the Americans. Washington also recognized that British control of the South would provide them with access to supplies for supporting their operations in the rest of North America and the West Indies.³ Washington later sympathized with Governor Thomas Jefferson over British raids along the Chesapeake, but pointed out that the British force in the Carolinas comprised a greater threat to Virginia. Washington saw the coastal raids as a diversion to draw forces away from the Carolinas and urged Jefferson to provide

increased assistance to Nathanael Greene's army because that was where Virginia's security truly rested.⁴ Clearly Washington understood the strategic importance of a southern campaign.

Benjamin Lincoln certainly understood the importance of Charlestowne, but did not appear to have looked at the campaign in a larger context. His successor, Horatio Gates, took a similarly myopic view in seeing the British Army as the principal object. This narrow approach naturally led to discontinuities between national military objectives and operational planning in the southern theater. In contrast, Nathanael Greene realized that he could accept tactical losses, as long as he avoided operational defeat. Greene understood that he was unlikely win the war in the Carolinas, but that it was completely possible to lose the war there. Greene's outlook mirrored Washington's own. Washington had adopted a similar strategy in the North. Despite criticism, Washington knew that preserving his army was more important than seeking a decisive victory.

Washington's selected Nathanael Greene to command the Southern Department exactly because the two men thought alike. Greene would not require close guidance. General Washington's only positive instructions for Greene consisted of an ambiguous admonishment to "stop the progress" of the enemy.⁵ Other than that, a grant of *carte blanche* was Washington's only guidance to Nathanael Greene: "Uninformed as I am of the enemy's force in that quarter, of our own, or of the resources (that you will have available), I can give you no particular instructions, but must leave you to govern yourself entirely according to your own prudence and judgment, and the circumstances in which you find yourself."⁶

Decentralizing authority is encouraged in our modern doctrine. With the limited communications of the Eighteenth Century, such faith in a subordinate's judgment was imperative. Washington had absolute faith in Nathanael Greene. Following Gates' debacle, Patriot hopes were dim. Washington selected Greene to salvage American fortunes in the South, because Nathanael Greene was the next best thing to Washington going south himself.⁷ Greene did not disappoint. He prosecuted a highly successful campaign with very little in the way of resources, achieving an end state that directly supported Washington's national objectives.

Each successive commander of the Southern Department identified what he believed to be the appropriate end state for the campaign. The Southern Campaign's end state needed to support the national military objectives of eroding the British will to fight and encouraging foreign intervention. Both Lincoln and Gates missed this point. Each of these unsuccessful commanders sought a quick end to the campaign by engaging the British in decisive battle. Unfortunately, they both got their decisive battle. In defeat, Horatio Gates finally recognized the magnitude of the risk he had run. Gates belatedly realized that, with the American army demolished, Cornwallis was free to overrun the Carolinas. If the South were lost, the British could focus their efforts against Washington's army from two directions.⁸ Lincoln saw denying the British a foothold in the South as the end state and Gates saw it as pushing them back into the sea.

Nathanael Greene identified an end state that supported national military objectives and was within his limited means. Greene considered a protracted campaign to wear down Cornwallis' force and discourage Loyalist confidence as the end state that would best serve American interests. In fact, such an end state matched very well with

General Washington's goals. Washington observed that as long as British forces remained committed in the South, the British could not fully concentrate in the North.⁹ He saw the Southern Campaign as an opportunity to strategically fix the enemy by keeping them occupied and contained in South Carolina until the Southern Army could be reinforced.¹⁰ Greene's campaign plan did strategically fix the British in the South and exhausted their will to continue fighting.

Having arrived at the wrong conclusions as to the desired end state for the campaign, Benjamin Lincoln and Horatio Gates were doomed to select inappropriate campaign objectives. General Washington understood the risk of decisive battle, but never conveyed his views to Lincoln or Gates. Washington did not think that the Southern Army would be able to do anything more than keep the British occupied in the South until French assistance could be brought to bear. He realized that preservation of the force was essential.¹¹ General Lincoln saw his objective as denying the British access to the Carolinas, something he lacked sufficient force to accomplish. Instead of preserving his army as a standing force, Lincoln sacrificed it in the futile defense of Charlestowne.¹² Unaware that Lincoln had already surrendered, Washington wrote, "I am exceedingly anxious for the fate of Charles Town; more so for the Garrison, and the accumulated stores in it."¹³ The loss of Lincoln's army was a far greater blow to the Patriot cause than the loss of Charlestowne by itself would have been. Without this force to oppose the British Army, the entire South lay vulnerable.¹⁴

Horatio Gates' objective of decisive battle to deny the British control of the state was flawed because he too lacked adequate force to achieve this objective. The army that General Gates led represented a second chance for Patriot hopes in the South.

Considering the limited resources available across the fledgling states, such a second chance was not something to be taken lightly or risked unnecessarily. Gates' small force of about 1,520 soldiers was greatly outnumbered by British and Loyalist forces in South Carolina. Nonetheless, Gates chose to go on the attack rather than husbanding his forces to serve as a rallying point for militia forces and popular sentiment.¹⁵ The swift destruction of Gates' Army at Camden once again left the South bare to British force, with the exception of the irregular resistance carried on by a few scattered partisan groups. Both Lincoln and Gates made decisive battle their objective with disastrous consequences.

Nathanael Greene realized that his incarnation of the Southern Army was probably the last. He did not underestimate the importance of preserving his army and realized that Lord Cornwallis would spare no effort to destroy the American force. He also seemed to have a better understanding than either of his predecessors of how the theater end state should support national level strategy. Greene knew that the destruction of his army would leave the Carolinas and Virginia unprotected from the British.¹⁶ With this in mind, he sought to maintain his army in being rather than risk battle under anything other than highly favorable conditions.¹⁷ Nathanael Greene would not repeat the mistake of trying to defeat the British by fighting on their terms.

In addition to the essential need of preserving the army as an entity, General Greene recognized the qualitative mismatch between his force and its British counterpart. His experiences fighting in the North had left him with an almost total lack of faith in the efficacy of militia. Conditions in the South however, would force him to rely heavily on such forces if he were to have much of an army at all. Preservation of his army became

one of Greene's primary campaign objectives both as a matter of strategic logic and out of necessity given his means.

Ultimately, Nathanael Greene's desire to preserve the army may have cost him tactical victories at Guilford Courthouse, Ninety-Six, and at Eutaw Springs. In each case he withdrew rather than commit the full measure of his resources. At Guilford Courthouse he held back his reserve and at Ninety-Six and Eutaw Springs he retreated rather than force the issue to a decisive conclusion. His willingness to forego a tactical victory in order to preserve his operational strength had great strategic value. Had Nathanael Greene pressed for decisive victory in any of these instances he would have risked incapacitating or losing his army. Greene understood that the strategic value of his army was in its existence more than its ability to defeat its British counterpart. As long as the Southern Army retained the mobility and strength to pose a challenge to Cornwallis' Army, the British could not claim control of the Carolinas.¹⁸ This not only suggests Greene's tremendous capacity as a strategist, but also indicates his selfless pursuit of the national aims over personal interests in an era when tactical victories brought glory, prestige, and not infrequently a degree of wealth.

Each of the succeeding American commanders sought to achieve his objectives by focusing on British centers of gravity. General Lincoln's efforts to deny the British possession of the seaport at Charlestowne reflect his awareness that the city would serve as the center of British logistics operations. Furthermore, Lincoln submitted to pressure from local political leaders who demanded the defense of Charlestowne as the Patriot political and economic center of gravity in the South.¹⁹ Other military leaders of the day, including Washington himself, had been loudly criticized for placing the survival of their

army above the defense of a city. Congress and the public found it inexcusable for an army to give up an important city without a fight. In layman's logic, the purpose of the army was to defend the populace of such cities. Benjamin Lincoln was certainly aware of such sentiment.²⁰ General Lincoln accepted a static defensive role to protect the city as an American center of gravity and deny the British use of the port as one of their centers of gravity.²¹

Horatio Gates' actions indicate his focus on the British Army as the principal center of gravity but not the sole source of British power and mobility in the South. His rationale for attacking when and where he did demonstrates that General Gates also identified other British centers of gravity, including lines of communication, control of the countryside, Loyalist support and British morale. Gates chose the British post at Camden as his objective in part because it commanded access to the backcountry and he hoped to sever British lines of communication and deny the enemy control of the countryside. General Gates also hoped that a quick victory would demoralize the British Army and their Loyalist base of support and conversely boost Patriot morale and popular support. The British commanders, Sir Henry Clinton and Lord Cornwallis, recognized the fluctuating nature of public support and worried over this very possibility themselves.²² Unfortunately, Gates' believed that decisive battle was the best way to attack these British centers of gravity.

Nathanael Greene adopted a balanced approach towards undermining the core elements of British strength in the southern theater. Greene saw the same centers of gravity that Gates had recognized but used more indirect methods of attacking them. Instead of facing Cornwallis in open battle, General Greene used irregular forces to strike

at British lines of communication and rear areas while the British Army pursued Greene's main force across the countryside. The continuous interference of Patriot militia raiders on British lines of communication hampered Cornwallis' logistical operations and effectively isolated the British outposts in the interior. These irregular American forces denied Cornwallis any reliably secure communications between his scattered outstations.²³ Together, the regular and irregular American forces successfully denied Cornwallis control of the countryside while wearing down his army.

Patriot militias and irregulars also targeted Loyalists to suppress British efforts to raising Loyalist militias. Cornwallis' fears were realized as the British defeat at Cowpens boosted popular support for the Americans while dampening enthusiasm for actively supporting the British.²⁴ Faced with both a conventional and an unconventional threat operating in tandem, Cornwallis could not effectively respond. By concentrating his forces to crush the conventional threat, the British commander could not suppress the irregular Patriot forces.²⁵ As long as Cornwallis focused on destroying Greene's Army, he was neglecting the intended effort to build Loyalist militias capable of countering Patriot militias. Nathanael Greene used compound warfare to optimize his resources and weaken British centers of gravity.

The American commanders' perceptions of British centers of gravity led to the decisive points where they each focused their efforts. Each succeeding commander of the Southern Army perceived a different decisive point, or points, as the key to negating British power and freedom of movement in the Carolinas. Where and how Generals Lincoln, Gates and Greene applied their forces demonstrates what each of them regarded as essential to achieve victory.

Benjamin Lincoln saw Charlestowne as the decisive point for the Southern Campaign. He accurately identified the strategic and operational importance of Charlestowne to the British. Without Charlestowne, the British could not control South Carolina. Yet the converse was not necessarily true; control of the state did not derive automatically from possession of Charlestowne. More importantly, General Lincoln failed to appreciate the strategic importance inherent in the existence of a standing army in the South. He ceded the advantages of depth and mobility by confining his force within the breastworks at Charlestowne instead of withdrawing into the backcountry where he could elude the superior enemy force. Consequently, the British were able to isolate and defeat the American army with relative ease. Lincoln's surrender left the Southern Department fully exposed to the will of the British Army. In his perception of decisive points, Lincoln was correct insofar as the British required control of Charlestowne to implement their campaign plan, but he lacked adequate force to repel the British invasion and did not seem to have identified alternative decisive points to focus his efforts against.

General Lincoln faced a good deal of political pressure to defend Charlestowne. Many such leaders believed that the Patriot cause would crumble across the entire South following the British capture of the city.²⁶ South Carolina Governor John Rutledge also insisted that the Southern Army defend the city, and the Continental Congress' instructions left Lincoln with the impression that they too expected him to keep his army there.²⁷ Washington's observation that the British most likely held Charlestowne as a primary objective may have led Lincoln to interpret the defense of Charlestowne as Washington's intent as well.²⁸ Washington expressed his concern for the defense of Charlestowne, "If they succeed against Charles Town, there is much reason to believe the

southern States will become the principal theatre of the war.”²⁹ Lincoln succumbed and committed his entire force to the defense of Charlestowne, leaving no room for miscalculation.

Horatio Gates viewed the British garrison at Camden as a decisive point, but not the decisive point. While he certainly realized that one victory would not win the campaign, Gates believed that a quick victory was necessary to seize the operational initiative and set the stage for further decisive operations. The hiatus of American forces from the field following Charlestowne had dampened popular enthusiasm for the Patriot cause and emboldened Loyalist activism. Gates wanted to strike a blow that would reverse the momentum and swing popular sentiment back in the Patriots’ favor. Despite his critics, Gates was not blind to the risks that he accepted. In his judgment, the greater risk was inaction and the continued deterioration of morale and confidence.³⁰ At the operational level, there was logic to his actions. It was at the tactical level that Horatio Gates erred. The force that Gates led onto the field at Camden was quantitatively symmetrical or superior to the British force in both size and disposition. Qualitatively the British force was more than a match for Gates’ ill-fed, poorly equipped and relatively untrained army.³¹ Gates may have understood that a single victory could not win the campaign, but he lost sight of the fact that a single defeat could lose the campaign.

Nathanael Greene comprehended the multiplicity of decisive points that he could attack to weaken his British opponent. Unwilling to risk his army in one single decisive gamble, he discerned the decisive effect of chipping away at British strength and support. In other words, Greene shrewdly came to realize that suppressing Loyalist support and provoking Cornwallis towards culmination were the ideal decisive points given the

means available to him. The American victories at Kings Mountain and Cowpens may not have been decisive in destroying Cornwallis' Army, yet these victories were decisive in quelling Loyalist confidence and fervor and simultaneously increased Patriot support.³² The American victory at Cowpens improved the numerical odds facing Nathanael Greene significantly. Cornwallis lost approximately one-third of his total force at Cowpens.³³

Greene used the Dan River as another decisive point. By crossing the Dan, General Greene put his army in a position to receive reinforcements from the Virginians while having forced Lord Cornwallis to operate well beyond his supply bases.³⁴ Guilford Courthouse proved to be Greene's final decisive point. Although the British won the field, Cornwallis lost more than a quarter of his force.³⁵ These losses were trained veteran soldiers and officers that Cornwallis could not replace. Through a series of tangible decisive points at Kings Mountain, Cowpens, the Dan River and Guilford Courthouse, Nathanael Greene achieved decisive results by suppressing Loyalist sentiment and inciting British culmination.

The operational concept each successive commander adopted in the Southern Department matched his vision of centers of gravity and decisive points. Each in turn endeavored to find the best way to apply his available assets to achieve the campaign objectives. General Benjamin Lincoln elected to consolidate his forces within defensive positions at Charleston and wait on relief from Washington's Army rather than withdrawing into the interior in the face of Clinton's Army.³⁶ British mastery of the seaboard meant that Clinton could land his army at any point from Charlestowne to Savannah. Even though he expected the British to disembark at Savannah and attack overland, Lincoln determined that placing his army at Charlestowne was the surest way

to protect the city. Any other disposition would leave the city undefended if a British force landed close enough to interpose itself between Lincoln's Army and Charlestowne. General Lincoln dared not divide his already small army for fear of meeting defeat in detail.³⁷ Perhaps General Lincoln's own experience at Savannah and the failed British attempt to seize Charleston in 1776 convinced him that a static defense offered him the greatest operational advantages. Charlestowne's location offered significant defensive advantages with its swampy environs and well-protected harbor.³⁸ Unfortunately for Lincoln, the same characteristics that made the city favorable to defend, also made it easy to get trapped in.

Horatio Gates' operational concept was to build confidence and momentum with an early victory. To accomplish this, he used large numbers of militia to supplement his regulars and moved his force as rapidly as possible to overwhelm the British garrison at Camden.³⁹ As soon as General Gates consolidated the forces of the rebuilt Southern Army, he put his army on the march into British held South Carolina. Subordinate leaders and troops alike were startled at the sudden assumption of offensive action without time to prepare or lay on provisions. Gates eschewed the circuitous line of march recommended by his officers that would take the army through areas friendly to the cause and facilitate foraging. Instead, he plotted a direct course to Camden to strike a quick blow against the British.⁴⁰ Gates' intention to seize the initiative and quickly restore American confidence would provide the states incentive to offer greater support to the Southern Army. Following his humiliating defeat, Gates retired into North Carolina and began attempting to gather the remnants of his army.

Nathanael Greene seems to have developed his operational concept in stages as the situation changed. Before even assuming command, Greene had articulated his initial concept for creating a “flying army.” This force would be small and mobile and designed to deny the British control of the interior.⁴¹ General Greene also sought to create favorable conditions to meet the British in battle. Upon assuming command, Greene’s plan was to seize the initiative by forcing Cornwallis to react to the split disposition of American forces. Greene detached Daniel Morgan with the flying army to threaten Cornwallis’ left flank.⁴² Meanwhile irregular forces operated in coordination with Greene to disrupt British communications and subdue the Loyalists.

Daniel Morgan’s victory at Cowpens gave the Americans the initiative but also forced General Greene to change his operational course of action. Greene could not simply allow Cornwallis to advance unchecked into North Carolina, but he also recognized that his army was still no match for the much larger British force.⁴³ With an eye towards the ever-important preservation of his force, Nathanael Greene began a withdrawal towards the Virginia border. Greene’s operational concept during this phase, known as the Race to the Dan, was to unite his and Morgan’s forces and simply outrun Cornwallis’ Army. Moving swiftly north with a rear guard to harass and delay the British pursuit, Greene’s Army crossed into Virginia to rest, refit and rebuild strength in preparation for later operations.⁴⁴ Nathanael Greene grasped the idea that the purpose of a withdrawal is to preserve a force, but also used the operation to exhaust his British pursuers.

Greene’s ultimate goal was to face the British in battle, but he was patient enough to wait for advantageous terms to present arise. He would not repeat the mistake of

Horatio Gates and accept battle from a position of clear inferiority. Creating favorable conditions for battle had been Greene's objective throughout the campaign.⁴⁵ The British force was degraded through losses suffered at Cowpens, physical and moral energy exhausted in the Race to the Dan, and the evaporation of Loyalist support. Meanwhile Greene's ability to raise Patriot militia support increased and his withdrawal into Virginia allowed him to draw Continental Army reinforcements there as well. Finally, General Greene felt ready to meet Cornwallis in battle at Guilford Courthouse in March of 1781.⁴⁶ Greene's operational concept made good use of his available means to attack British centers of gravity and accomplish theater objectives. Light and irregular forces harassed the British and squelched their potential local support, while the Southern Army drew Cornwallis' force further and further from its supply lines.

Of the three American generals that commanded the Southern Department, only Nathanael Greene actually used sequential phases to prosecute his campaign plan. Considering the quick defeats of Lincoln and Gates, neither officer realized the opportunity to continue beyond their initial phase. Arguably, Horatio Gates intended further operations following Camden but the results of that battle prevented him from progressing into any subsequent phases. Nathanael Greene however conducted the Southern Campaign in clearly delineated phases. These phases included preparation, seizing the initiative, withdrawal and stretching of the British supply lines, an operational pause in Virginia, meeting Cornwallis in battle, and the reconquest of South Carolina.

General Greene took the time to develop a detailed and comprehensive estimate of the situation before making any moves. The extensive data collected by his quartermaster, commissary, engineer and scouts provided Greene with a good grasp of

his capabilities and limitations. Gates had skipped this step with disastrous results.⁴⁷

Nathanael Greene, on the other hand made certain that he knew exactly what forces he had available.⁴⁸ General Gates also set aside the issue of logistics. One of Greene's initial acts was to appoint a quartermaster general who worked with the state governments to requisition supplies for the army. Requisitioning material that was in danger of British capture was a central element of the quartermaster general's function. In this way, Greene was able to inhibit Cornwallis' ability to live off the land. Although plagued by chronic shortages, the southern army's basic needs were met throughout the rest of the campaign.⁴⁹ General Greene also ordered a detailed study of the topography over which he would move and fight. Recognizing the rivers as key terrain, Greene ordered boats pre-positioned at river crossings to facilitate his ability to maintain the rapid tempo.⁵⁰ Such preparations allowed General Greene to keep one step ahead of Cornwallis and fight the campaign on his own terms.

Nathanael Greene's second phase was to gain the initiative. When Greene assumed command, General Gates had been in the process of making preparations for the army to move into winter quarters. General Greene abandoned this idea. Cornwallis' disposition in the interior indicated his intent to continue operations without a winter respite.⁵¹ General Greene forced Cornwallis to react by splitting his forces and sending Morgan's "flying army" to threaten the British left flank. After the partisan victory at Kings Mountain, Greene figured that the British would not venture lightly into the western reaches of the Carolinas.⁵² General Cornwallis responded by dividing his army into three principal elements. The main British force faced Greene's main body, while Tarleton's Legion pursued Morgan and an operational reserve remained at Camden.⁵³

Greene's arrayal of forces achieved his first objective by taking the initiative away from Cornwallis and dispersing British combat power.

Following the American victory at Cowpens, Greene seized on the unexpected opportunity and transitioned to a new phase of stretching Cornwallis' supply lines. His earlier study of the terrain and rivers may indicate that he foresaw such a contingency arising. In any case, his preparations allowed him to make effective use of the opportunity. Nathanael Greene's ability to immediately comprehend a suddenly changed situation and determine how to react to it reflects his mental agility and aptitude for command. Some fifty years later, the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz would describe this trait as *coup d'oeil*, an innate perception and intuition. According to Clausewitz, *coup d'oeil* is an indispensable characteristic for dealing with the uncertainties of warfare.⁵⁴ The Race to the Dan phase constituted an operational level withdrawal but Greene enjoyed the advantage of interior lines. Lacking sufficient force to fight Cornwallis' Army, General Greene elected to withdraw towards Virginia where he might gain reinforcements and fresh supplies.⁵⁵ At the same time, Lord Cornwallis' attempt to catch up to the American Army drove the British force closer and closer to its culmination point. Greene took an operational pause to recover and build up strength once he had crossed his army into Virginia. Cornwallis found himself trying to feed his army in the middle of inhospitable country where he could do little to assuage his logistical shortcomings. This contrast in conditions set the stage for Greene's phase of head-to-head battle.

The Battle of Guilford Courthouse represented Nathanael Greene's decisive phase of directly confronting Cornwallis on a conventional battlefield. Throughout the

campaign, Greene had sought an advantageous opportunity to face his adversary with a fair prospect of winning. The effects of Kings Mountain, Cowpens, and the Race to the Dan had weakened the British Army. Greene's Army conversely gained in strength as increased confidence translated into greater militia support and assistance from Virginia. Even though the British narrowly won at Guilford Courthouse, the battle consumed their last reserves of strength without destroying the American force. The costly battle was the proximate cause of British culmination in the South. Greene's tactical defeat brought operational victory.

Eliminating the British occupation of South Carolina was the final phase of Nathanael Greene's Southern Campaign. After Guilford Courthouse, Greene retained the initiative. He decided to take his army back into South Carolina and reduce the British outposts there. This shift would force the British to either abandon North Carolina to protect their hold on South Carolina, or lose South Carolina to the Americans.⁵⁶ General Cornwallis had withdrawn his broken army to Wilmington. Even had he the strength or inclination to counter General Greene's return to South Carolina, there were no routes from Wilmington that Cornwallis could use to link up with British forces in the interior or at Charlestowne.⁵⁷ Around 8,000 British forces held South Carolina, but these were scattered across numerous small garrisons that were not mutually supporting and were thus vulnerable to being defeated in detail. Greene deployed his regular and irregular forces against the British garrisons concurrently.⁵⁸ A few smaller battles at Hobkirk's Hill, Ninety-Six and Eutaw Springs forced the British to abandon their interior fortifications and fall back on Charlestowne. Except for the British enclaves at Charlestowne and Wilmington, the Americans had driven the British from the Carolinas.

Ultimately, Nathanael Greene succeeded because he matched his means to his ends. Although he had less to work with than his British opponent, or even than either of his predecessors, Greene made excellent use of his scarce resources. Shortage of supplies and manpower led Benjamin Lincoln and Horatio Gates to vastly different operational approaches than Nathanael Greene adopted based on the same material constraints. Lincoln concentrated his chronically under-strength army behind the earthworks at Charlestowne and relied on the defender's traditional advantages to make up the disparity of strength between his force and the British. Gates rushed an ill-prepared army into battle in hopes that a shift in momentum would bring about a change in his logistical fortunes by rallying public support. Where Lincoln and Gates saw such shortages as rationale for gambling on decisive confrontations with the British, these scarcities led Greene to conclude that the preservation of his army was an imperative.

The lack of resources was a consistent obstacle for American leaders in the South from the very outset of the campaign. Benjamin Lincoln had petitioned the state government as well as Congress and the Continental Army for support during his entire tenure as commander of the Southern Department.⁵⁹ General Washington encouraged Lincoln to look to the southern states themselves for assistance as they were more "immediately interested" and the Continental Army could provide little if any help.⁶⁰ Yet Washington did understand the destitution of the southern states and implored Congress to provide men and material for the Southern Department.⁶¹ Many in Congress, as well as inhabitants of Virginia and North Carolina, criticized South Carolina for relying so heavily on external support while doing little to provide for their own defense.⁶² Lincoln too was especially frustrated at the lack of support from within South Carolina itself.⁶³

General Lincoln applied his forces solely in the defense of Charlestowne. To a large extent, he based this decision on a lack of appreciation for the capabilities of the different components of his force. Lincoln held little faith in his militia forces. With only about 1,000 regulars under his command, he felt that he could successfully defend Charlestowne, but did not consider his army strong enough to control the interior of South Carolina.⁶⁴ General Lincoln was hesitant to put his army in the open field and elected to rely on fortified positions. This perspective overlooked the fact that merely contesting control of the interior could deny the British firm control of South Carolina. Lincoln surrendered some 5,400 men, a like number of muskets, and almost 400 guns. Perhaps the greatest loss among these was the more than 2,500 veteran Continental soldiers that could not be replaced.⁶⁵ As Lincoln did not see that keeping his army intact was more important than holding onto Charlestowne, he committed all of his forces towards an objective that was not feasible and therefore he failed to achieve a favorable end state.

Where Lincoln's application of resources had been overly defensive, Horatio Gates displayed outright recklessness with his limited means. Although Gates was fully aware that his army was weak and poorly equipped, he launched this force on the offensive immediately upon assuming command. Even before arriving in the Carolinas, Horatio Gates seemed to appreciate the destitute condition of the command that he was inheriting. He described the situation as, "...an Army without Strength – a Military Chest without money, A Department apparently deficient in public spirit, and a Climate that encreases (sic) Despondency instead of animating the Soldiers Arm."⁶⁶ Nonetheless, Gates eschewed appointing a quartermaster general and vainly placed his confidence in

the states to provide for his army's logistical needs.⁶⁷ He made no assessment of the means available and consequently threw his army into battle with no clear idea of his strengths and weaknesses. Tactically, Gates failed to distinguish between the capabilities of his militia and regular troops and attempted to use the militia in the same fashion as regulars at Camden.⁶⁸ Gates' use of his available means proved wholly infeasible. By squandering his force, Horatio Gates failed to achieve the campaign objectives.

Nathanael Greene applied his scanty resources effectively in pursuit of his campaign objectives. He understood that he could not afford to waste anything. Greene responded to his appointment as commander with a letter to Congress assuring them "I will endeavor to make the most of the means put into my hands."⁶⁹ By the time General Greene arrived to assume command, Gates had taken positive steps to rebuild the Southern Army yet still lacked desperately for provisions and equipment.⁷⁰ Greene assumed command of a dispirited army composed of some 2,450 men in want of practically every basic necessity. Although this force was larger in number than Gates had begun with, regulars composed less than half of the force, and almost three quarters of the total were unfit physically for immediate service.⁷¹

Despite this bleak situation, George Washington expressed "great confidence . . . in the abilities of General Greene to call forth and apply the resources of the country in the best and most effectual manner to its defence (sic)."⁷² While General Washington estimated that it would take a standing force of some six thousand to effectively counter Lord Cornwallis, Greene succeeded with far fewer.⁷³ Greene's adaptability and willingness to make the most of what was at hand were essential to his success as an operational commander.

Greene leveraged the two critical factors of operational mobility and synchronization to maximize the potency of his force. Although Nathanael Greene would have preferred a large force composed mostly of Continental regulars, he was forced to rely on militia. Rather than trying to employ the militia beyond their capabilities, General Greene was pragmatic enough to look for the advantages inherent in his mixed force. Regular officers generally viewed militia forces as unreliable because they could, and would, rapidly dissipate into the surrounding countryside.

Nathanael Greene accepted this characteristic and focused on concentrating forces only when and where needed to fight. One of the consistent features of Eighteenth Century American armies was the fluidity of numbers created by a reliance on militias and short terms of enlistment. Under such conditions, it was difficult to keep an army together for long. Turning this feature to his advantage, Greene used the ability to mass and disperse his forces as needed to frustrate British attempts to catch the American Army.⁷⁴ Nathanael Greene's operational success was founded on his ability to marshal sufficient resources at the right time to strike.

General Greene's synchronization of Patriot forces compounded the effects of his meager resources by keeping British forces off balance and overburdened by simultaneous threats. Cornwallis' Army could not respond effectively to irregular raiders and Greene's main army at the same time. Nathanael Greene established mutually supporting relationships with irregular leaders such as Francis Marion and Thomas Sumter. These partisans and irregular militias were effective at conducting reconnaissance and harassing raids that supported Greene's operations.⁷⁵ Operating in

concert, the regular and irregular forces posed multiple threats to the British Army from different directions.

Greene also synchronized separate conventional elements of his force by detaching Morgan to the west while positioning the remainder of his army to Cornwallis front. After Cowpens, the two wings withdrew in tandem until they linked up. Although these elements were some 140 miles apart initially, Greene was able to join the two together before Cornwallis could interpose the British force between them.⁷⁶ As a direct result of this agile American withdrawal, Lord Cornwallis made the fateful decision to destroy his trains. While Cornwallis plunged deeper into North Carolina in his pursuit of Nathanael Greene, Thomas Sumter and Francis Marion were leading their irregular bands on raiding forays throughout South Carolina.⁷⁷ During the final phase of the Southern Campaign, Greene used synchronized attacks to drive the British from their backcountry posts. General Greene moved his main body against the British garrison at Camden while sending the irregular forces under Marion, Pickens and Sumter to attack other British outposts nearly simultaneously.⁷⁸ Nathanael Greene applied his available resources using synchronization and operational mobility to achieve his desired end state of a protracted campaign that wore down British strength and will.

Culmination was another central factor for both sides throughout the Southern Campaign. For the British, it proved their undoing. General Lincoln's Army never culminated logistically, but certainly would have had the siege of Charlestowne continued. Lincoln's surrender marked a culmination of organized resistance in the South however. When General Gates arrived in North Carolina, the army had remained static long enough that the resources of the local area had been exhausted. Gates understood

that the army needed to move or starve.⁷⁹ As he later counseled an irregular officer, “Whenever you find famine, you cannot do better than to march away from it.”⁸⁰ Yet Gates did not allow time for his army to prepare for the offensive and exacerbated matters by selecting a route that increased the difficulty of sustaining the army.⁸¹ In effect, Gates cut the tenuous supply lines that he had in order to strike rapidly. Gates’ decision to choose speed over sustainability offers an interesting parallel to Lord Cornwallis’ similar choice later on in the campaign. Gates’ failure to prepare against tactical culmination contributed to his loss at Camden, a defeat with strategic implications that represented the second culmination of organized Patriot resistance.

General Greene was more cognizant of culmination both as a danger to his own force and as a weapon to wield against the British. His experience as quartermaster general of the Continental Army prepared him for the challenges of making the most efficient use possible of the meager resources in the South.⁸² Greene understood that his total defeat or culmination would probably mean the loss of the Carolinas for good and leave Virginia easily assailable.⁸³ With this in mind, Greene took great pains to insure that his army had the bare necessities of supply and transportation. Routes of withdrawal crossed areas where local support was reliable, provisions available, and rivers were fordable or boats pre-positioned.

In effect, local support offered Greene’s Army the advantages of interior lines even though he was operating on a non-contiguous battlefield. As a result, Greene’s Army was able to avoid culmination despite its constant privations. At the same time, he was bringing his enemy closer to physical and moral culmination with every mile. Additionally, the ability to disperse forces reduced the American logistical requirements

in a given area. Greene's forces camped in dispersed locations to ease foraging requirements.⁸⁴ Greene also recognized the need to suspend his operational tempo and allow time to reconsolidate and refit. At the end of his extended withdrawal across North Carolina, Greene took a valuable operational pause to rebuild his strength in Virginia. This pause benefited the Americans who were close to friendly sources of supply and reinforcements while the British were not.

The American campaign strategy was based on the national political objective of Independence. To support the national military strategy of breaking Britain's political will, it was essential that the Southern Department maintain an active army in the field as a theater-level objective. Lincoln and Gates saw the ends as defeating the British Army. This goal was unsuitable as well as infeasible. General Greene correctly identified the desired end state and theater objectives. Greene's ends of wearing down the British in a protracted campaign and denying them control of the countryside were suitable because they supported Washington's strategic end state.

General Greene recognized the British centers of gravity of Loyalist support, will to fight, and control of the countryside in addition to Cornwallis' army. More importantly, Greene comprehended which ones he could attack and when. He developed a flexible operational concept and was able to make rapid transitions in response to changing conditions. Greene's operational concept, or ways, supported the desired ends by preserving his force while exhausting his enemy. The operational concept began with seizing the initiative through operational maneuver by dividing his force. After Cowpens, Greene shifted to a withdrawal while seeking a favorable opportunity to stand and fight. After an operational pause in Virginia, Greene met Cornwallis at Guilford Courthouse.

Following Cornwallis' withdrawal to the coast, Greene returned to the offensive and drove the British from the South Carolina backcountry. Greene's concept was acceptable because he never risked more than he could afford to lose.

For the Americans, means were especially scarce. The army in the South grew smaller, less experienced, and relied increasingly on militia for each commander in turn. Greene recognized the large role militia would have in the absence of greater numbers of regulars. Greene's background as a quartermaster lent him a firm grasp on logistics that acted as a force multiplier. Nathanael Greene's ability to synchronize disparate resources often made up for the lack of resources. Despite chronic shortages of manpower and materiel, General Greene was able to match his means to the desired ends in a consistently feasible manner.

This chapter examined American campaign strategy using the operational design model. Generals Benjamin Lincoln and Horatio Gates failed to match their ends, ways, and means. Neither of these leaders perceived the theater objective of maintaining a viable force in the field. Nathanael Greene succeeded because he did understand the end state necessary to support the national aims and effectively applied his means to achieve it.

¹Matloff, 89.

²George Washington to the President of Congress, 20 August 1780, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 8, 1779-1780, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1890), 391.

³Washington to Major-General Lincoln, 28 September 1779, 60.

⁴Washington to Governor Jefferson, 6 February 1781; George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 9, 1780-1782, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1890), 136.

⁵Washington to Major-General Greene, 14 October 1780, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 8, 496.

⁶Washington to Major-General Greene, 22 October 1780, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 9, 9-10.

⁷George Washington to Nathanael Greene, 18 October 1780, *The Papers of Nathanael Greene*, vol. 6, ed. Richard K. Showman and Dennis Conrad (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1991), 410.

⁸Samuel White Patterson, *Horatio Gates: Defender of American Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 313.

⁹Washington to Governor Rutledge of South Carolina, 16 May 1780, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 8, 272.

¹⁰Washington to Major-General Gates, 8 October 1780, 477.

¹¹Washington to President of Congress, 15 September 1780, 441.

¹²Joseph B. Mitchell, *Discipline and Bayonets: The Armies and Leaders in the War of the American Revolution* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1967), 136.

¹³Washington to James Duane, 13 May 1780, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 8, 263.

¹⁴David B. Mattern, "A Moderate Revolutionary: The Life of Major General Benjamin Lincoln" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1990), 215.

¹⁵Mitchell, 141.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁷Black, 212.

¹⁸Fletcher Pratt, *Eleven Generals* (New York: William Sloane, 1949), 34-35.

¹⁹Mattern, 171.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 184-185.

²¹*Ibid.*, 172.

²²Mitchell, 175-178.

²³R. Arthur Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America, 1775-1783* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 90-91.

- ²⁴Mitchell, 178-179.
- ²⁵Pratt, 34-35.
- ²⁶Mattern, 171-172.
- ²⁷*Ibid.*, 182.
- ²⁸Washington to Major-General Lincoln, 28 September 1779, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 8, 62.
- ²⁹Washington to Major-General Lincoln, 15 April 1780, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 8, 248.
- ³⁰Patterson, 305.
- ³¹*Ibid.*, 308.
- ³²Washington to Abner Nash, Governor of North Carolina, 6 November 1780, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 9, 18-19.
- ³³Mitchell, 180.
- ³⁴*Ibid.*, 183.
- ³⁵*Ibid.*, 198.
- ³⁶Patterson, 300.
- ³⁷Mattern, 186-187.
- ³⁸*Ibid.*, 183.
- ³⁹Mitchell, 143.
- ⁴⁰Patterson, 304-305.
- ⁴¹Nathanael Greene to George Washington, 31 October 1780, *The Papers of Nathanael Greene*, vol. 6, 448.
- ⁴²Washington to Major-General Greene, 8 November 1780, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 9, 25.
- ⁴³Mitchell, 161.
- ⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 182.

⁴⁵Nathanael Greene to Samuel Huntington, President of the Continental Congress, 28 December 1780, ed. Richard K. Showman and Dennis Conrad, *The Papers of Nathanael Greene*, vol. 7 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press for the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1994), 7-8.

⁴⁶Mitchell, 187.

⁴⁷Patterson, 305.

⁴⁸Mitchell, 161.

⁴⁹Pratt, 15.

⁵⁰Mitchell, 184.

⁵¹Pratt, 16.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 14.

⁵³Mitchell, 162.

⁵⁴Clausewitz, 102-103.

⁵⁵Black, 212.

⁵⁶Nathanael Greene to Baron Steuben, 2 April 1781, ed. Richard K. Showman and Dennis Conrad, *The Papers of Nathanael Greene*, vol. 8 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press for the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1995), 23-25.

⁵⁷Pratt, 25.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁵⁹Mattern, 172.

⁶⁰Washington, to Major-General Lincoln, 28 September 1779, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 8, 63.

⁶¹Washington to the President of Congress, 20 August 1780, 387-389.

⁶²Mattern, 175.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 180.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 173.

⁶⁵Mitchell, 137.

- ⁶⁶Patterson, 303.
- ⁶⁷Ibid., 302.
- ⁶⁸Mitchell, 142-143.
- ⁶⁹Nathanael Greene to Samuel Huntington, President of the Continental Congress, 27 October 1780, *The Papers of Nathanael Greene*, vol. 6, 436.
- ⁷⁰Patterson, 318.
- ⁷¹Mitchell, 161.
- ⁷²Washington to Abner Nash, Governor of North Carolina, 6 November 1780, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 9, 19.
- ⁷³Washington to President of Congress, 15 September 1780, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 9, 441.
- ⁷⁴Nathanael Greene to Marquis de Lafayette, 3 April 1781, *The Papers of Nathanael Greene*, vol. 9, 34.
- ⁷⁵Nathanael Greene to Francis Marion, 28 December 1780, *The Papers of Nathanael Greene*, vol. 7, 13.
- ⁷⁶Mitchell, 173.
- ⁷⁷Pratt, 22.
- ⁷⁸Ibid., 26.
- ⁷⁹Patterson, 305.
- ⁸⁰Ibid., 315.
- ⁸¹Ibid., 305.
- ⁸²Babits, 5.
- ⁸³Mitchell, 181.
- ⁸⁴Babits, 9.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

It is the fight between tiger and elephant. If the tiger stands his ground, the elephant will crush him with its mass. But, if he conserves his mobility, he will finally vanquish the elephant, who bleeds from a multitude of cuts.

Ho Chi Minh

This thesis demonstrates the use of the operational design model of strategic planning as an effective methodology for campaign analysis. Applying the elements of operational design to the Southern Campaign of 1780-1781 provides a useful illustration of how this modern strategic framework fits together. Although the process of strategy formulation was not as formalized in the Eighteenth Century as it is today, the same conceptual components of strategy are evident in this study of the Southern Campaign. This similarity indicates how modern planning constructs have evolved over the past 220 years. The importance of founding strategy on the basis of ends and means appears constant.

The British strategy in the Southern Campaign failed because their ends and means did not fit together. Focusing strictly on the application of his military means, Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis invalidated the central premise of the British plan, which was reliance on Loyalist militias. It is questionable whether the British Army could have pacified and held such a sprawling region to begin with using so few regular troops. Reliance on Loyalist support was intended to compensate for that limitation, but even assuming the British had enjoyed the active participation of every Loyalist in the Carolinas, the process would have taken a great deal of time. Under intense political

pressure in Parliament, time was one of the many resources that Lord North's administration did not have much of. Yet a lasting subjugation of the South could not be accomplished rapidly with a small force such as Cornwallis commanded. In the end, Cornwallis failed because the campaign he waged was not feasible with the means at hand.

On the American side of the issue, bringing ends and means together proved equally elusive. General Lincoln and Horatio Gates pursued the wrong ends and squandered the precious means that they each had. General Nathanael Greene had the benefit of his predecessors' failures to serve as a caution. More importantly, Greene had the benefit of insight into George Washington's thought process. Additionally, Nathanael Greene's experience as quartermaster general had taught him to make the most of what was available. This resourcefulness provides a powerful example for modern strategists and tacticians alike. As Fletcher Pratt put it, "Nathanael Greene made himself master of the circumstances he found, and left to the American Army a tradition it has never quite lost, of considering each problem in the light of its surrounding conditions."¹

There is more than a little irony in the fact that the British plan, which relied on a symbiotic mix of regular troops and militia, was defeated by the Americans' use of the same formula out of virtual necessity. Loyalist militias were an essential component of the campaign strategy for the British. The presence of a dominant regular army was required to establish the security and moral support that would allow Loyalists to rise. Loyalist forces were needed in turn to secure rear areas, lines of communication, and areas of the countryside that the regular forces had cleared of resistance. By performing these tasks, the Loyalist militias would free regular British troops to focus on expanding

the area of British control, defeating the conventional American army, and raising more Loyalist militias. The combination of conventional and unconventional American forces thwarted the British plan however, by created multiple threats that the British Army had to address simultaneously. American regular forces posed a threat that the British Army could not ignore while the American irregulars and militias denied British control of the countryside, interdicted British lines of communication, and suppressed Loyalist activity. Consequently, the British never established the conditions to create the forces needed to fulfill their campaign plan.

The resilience of Greene's army combined with the tenacity of southern partisans equated to an effective campaign of compound warfare that exhausted Cornwallis' army. The British could not counter both a conventional and an unconventional threat simultaneously. In their efforts to crush Greene's army, the British neglected the importance of popular support. Even their sympathizers were unwilling to rise in active support. Consequently, as Cornwallis' army moved across the Carolinas, it remained isolated and vulnerable. The physical and psychological effect of such campaigning proved overwhelming in the end so that despite winning most tactical battles, the British lost the campaign.

After two consecutive American failures, General Nathanael Greene implemented a campaign strategy that successfully matched the means available to theater objectives and national strategic goals. Benjamin Lincoln and Horatio Gates both failed to develop feasible ways to link their available means to the desired strategic ends. Despite the strategic significance of the campaign, Lincoln and Gates demonstrated a significant lack of understanding of the value of their embodied armies. Perhaps the national leadership

could have provided more guidance to insure an overall unity of national effort, but communications were slow and unreliable. The surest way to guard against such lapses was in selecting a commander that both understood the national strategic context and who was capable of operating effectively in the absence of clear guidance. In Nathanael Greene, Washington had such a man.

Lincoln and Gates were both unsuccessful in achieving any objectives that supported national war aims. Nonetheless, the popular will to resist the British occupation persisted and offered Nathanael Greene a foundation to build upon. Greene's operational concept made good use of the assets he had available to undermine British centers of gravity and meet theater level objectives that directly supported national war aims.

Greene's awareness of what constituted the enemy centers of gravity and his appreciation for the capabilities and limitations of his own forces resulted in a well-conceived and effective campaign. The symbiosis between regular and irregular American forces thwarted the British efforts to subdue the Carolinas. Cornwallis could either focus on destroying the American Army or suppressing the Patriot militias, but could not do both at once. The former course of action required concentration while the former demanded dispersion. Raising and training Loyalist militias under such circumstances proved impossible. General Greene focused his efforts on denying the British control of the countryside and suppressing Loyalist support while avoiding battle and maintaining his army in being. This resulted in a protracted campaign that tied up British resources and degraded British political will to continue the war. Nathanael Greene's Southern Campaign directly supported national objectives, and shaped the conditions for the decisive American victory at Yorktown.

Although the Southern Campaign was not strategically decisive, it did directly influence the outcome of the War for American Independence. Cornwallis' demoralized troops hobbled into Virginia as a result of their culmination in the Carolinas. Nathanael Greene set the conditions for Washington's ultimate victory. There is no better testament to Nathanael Greene's generalship than the epilogue to the Southern Campaign that took place at Yorktown. At the strategic level, Greene's campaign served as a shaping operation for Washington's decisive operation that for all purposes ended the war. Clearly General Greene held an end state in sight that directly supported national strategic objectives.

The Southern Campaign remains an excellent case study for many aspects of leadership. In this period of Transformation, conceptual skills are becoming more important than ever. Leaders must be able to think through complex situations rapidly and make conceptual linkages between disparate pieces of information. Nathanael Greene demonstrated an extraordinary capability to visualize his battlespace, articulate his vision, and synchronize diverse resources to achieve his objectives. Professor Larry Babits grasped General Greene's impact when he wrote, "Demoralized American forces received their most important reinforcement when Major General Nathanael Greene rode into Charlotte on 2 December 1780."²

In addition to his mental attributes and conceptual skills, General Greene displayed all of the modern leadership actions involving influencing, operating, and improving. He was decisive without being rash and the loyalty he inspired suggests his success at motivating subordinates. Greene exhibited each of the operating actions during the Southern Campaign as well. His assessments, plans, and preparations proved

invaluable and he executed his plans and contingencies extremely successfully. General Greene's improving actions were also evident in the Southern Campaign as he developed and built his staff and his army. Nathanael Greene in the Southern Campaign offers an ideal illustration of current leadership principles.

While there are many relevant lessons embedded in this study, the methodology highlights the critical relationship between ends, ways, and means in strategy formulation. This thesis exposed the elements of operational design within the American and British campaign strategies during the Southern Campaign. Those commanders that failed to match their ends to their means failed to meet their objectives. Nathanael Greene succeeded in the South because he made feasible use of his means in acceptable ways to meet suitable ends.

¹Pratt, 36.

²Babits, 5.

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